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**Cristina Massaccesi**

**Intertext and Postmodern Space in the Work  
of Pier Vittorio Tondelli**

**Ph.D. Thesis**

**Department of Italian, University College London**

**University of London**

**2007**

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***Dedicated to***  
***Carlo Di Giacomo***  
***(1948 - 2003)***

## **Abstract**

This thesis deals with the work of Pier Vittorio Tondelli (1955-91) and concerns the way in which the greater permeability of cultural borders and speed of information exchanges affects the production of contemporary fiction and makes national literatures open to permeation by other cultures. Tondelli provides in this respect an interesting case study since his works display a particular bent for hybridization, both of language and content. This thesis examines his literary and non-literary production, paying particular attention to intertextual and intercultural relations and to questions of cultural and virtual space. In contrast to the existing critical tradition on Tondelli it devotes equal attention to style and content. Fifteen years after Tondelli's death it is time for a different approach to his work; in particular it is important to read it through an intertextual perspective. Through a close textual analysis of his works, regarded as a complex patchwork of references (including film and music as well as literature), I intend to determine a typology of the different relations he established with his models in different texts and at different stages of his career. The contextualization of these relations and the analysis of certain recurrent narrative themes, such as separation and the journey, offers a new perspective on Tondelli's works.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first introduces two theories—postmodernism and intertextuality—that are central in the analysis of Tondelli's fiction. It also presents the literary production of Alberto Arbasino as a major influence on his works. The other three chapters focus on Tondelli's principal works of fiction.

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## Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to place the works of Pier Vittorio Tondelli in a broader perspective that goes beyond Italy and takes into account the strong intercultural and intertextual dimension of his literary production—an aspect that has not yet been adequately investigated. Other critics—for instance Bart Van Den Bossche and Giulio Iacoli—have underlined the international aspect of Tondelli's works, but a close analysis of the relations he established with his models—often of American and British origin, but also Middle-European and French, as we will see in Chapter 4—has not been attempted so far. The analysis of his intellectual and physical mobility will be central in creating a coherent web of connections that are able to explain the writer's relations with his models—which are not only writers from the literary canon, but also elements of popular culture such as films and music.

The close reading of Tondelli's texts—in some cases a comparison of a passage in Tondelli with a putative source or model, in others an analysis of single sentences—will be crucial in order to achieve this aim. From a theoretical perspective this close reading will be supported by the use of the concept of intertextuality and by key elements of theories of the postmodern—including the end of grand narratives and the collapse of the distinction between high and low culture—which are outlined in Chapter 1 and then applied throughout the thesis.

The end of the 1970s and the decline of the student movement marked for Italian literature the beginning of a period of renewal. Three landmark novels were published between the end of 1979 and the beginning of 1980: Enrico

Palandri's *Boccalone* (L'Erba Voglio, 1979), Claudio Piersanti's *Casa di nessuno* (Feltrinelli, 1980) and Tondelli's *Altri libertini* (Feltrinelli, 1980). These writers all display a renewed interest in narrative content as opposed to the strong emphasis on style typical of the authors of the Neoavanguardia.

In the panorama of the last twenty-five years of Italian literature the place of Tondelli remains absolutely central, more than fifteen years after his death, not only because of his continuous involvement with other young writers, but also because of his general attitude towards creative work. In his writing, the constant recovering of elements from different literary traditions does not coincide with a form of cultural reaction against the supposed novelty represented by the avant-garde. It is, rather, a constant search for models that can constitute a new and personal frame of reference. Elvio Facchinelli underlines the fracture between this generation of writers and the Italian literary tradition:

Questi giovani che scrivono, pur avendo un'attenzione a volte straordinaria per il linguaggio, non si considerano scrittori nel senso di una vocazione o di un destino. Non si iscrivono in una tradizione riconosciuta, con una posizione da conquistare o, peggio, una carriera da percorrere. Essi si sentono o si vogliono estranei rispetto alla più comune realtà italiana [...] Questa realtà è per loro un labirinto senza uscita e anche senza interesse. Rispetto a esso, sono dei latitanti; non si propongono né di abbatterlo né di percorrerlo: lo abbandonano. Ecco perché tra loro è così frequente e persino banale, negli scritti e nella vita, l'incrocio con altre lingue e altri paesi. (I, 1120).

In researching and writing this thesis I have sought to develop an original approach to Tondelli's works by a close analysis of these elements of 'incrocio'. I explore how they may either be cast in the form of a postmodern and post-national perspective, oriented towards the future, or turned towards the past, towards his

rural and provincial background. This peculiarity of Tondelli's dialectics of spaces has already been noted by Bart Van Den Bossche:

si assiste [...] da una parte ad una progressiva assimilazione dello spazio internazionale; dall'altra si verifica una specie di "implosione" dello spazio nazionale, che si trasforma in uno spazio opaco gremito di frammenti, percorsi secondo la ricetta sintetizzata nel breve saggio *Nei sotterranei della provincia*: basta vedere la provincia "con gli occhi dello scrittore attento ai margini, attento ai confini, che tutto appare eccitante, nuovo e diverso". Così la vera "scoperta" geografica avviene paradossalmente a livello di un ritorno alla "provincia", e in parecchi racconti tondelliani si registra una specie di esotismo degli spazi vicini piuttosto che di quelli lontani [...] La provincia si prospetta come uno spazio paradossale, sorprendentemente esotico ed eccezionalmente familiare.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Tondelli was continuously inspired by British and American culture, and in his later work also by German and Austrian writers, did not coincide in his case with a denial of his provincial background, but rather with a re-evaluation and re-discovery of this familiar dimension. In the thesis I aim to develop Van Den Bossche's insight by looking in detail at these two different spatial dimensions in Tondelli's work and reflecting on their significance.

Tondelli's posthumous status may be measured by the number of books and essays recently published on him. One of the most interesting is Roberto Carnero's *Lo spazio emozionale*, a skilful reconstruction of all of Tondelli's literary output from the point of view of his discourse on 'emotionality'.<sup>2</sup> The greatest merit of this book, characterized by careful and in-depth readings, is that it approaches Tondelli's works by placing itself, as Enrico Palandri writes in the

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<sup>1</sup> Bart Van Den Bossche, *La geografia letteraria nei romanzi e nei racconti di Tondelli*, <http://www.comune.bologna.it/iperbole/assrere/autori/tondelli.htm>, 1998. Page visited in March 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Roberto Carnero, *Lo spazio emozionale. Guida alla lettura di Pier Vittorio Tondelli*, Novara, Interlinea, 1998.

preface, 'a valle' of it, through the adoption of a perspective which goes beyond any form of critical factionalism, such as that of the Neoavanguardia or of the group around *Linea d'ombra*. The centrality of the emotional issue in Tondelli's works is also analysed by Antonio Spadaro in *Attraversare l'attesa*, published in 1999.<sup>3</sup> Spadaro tries to give a moral reading of Tondelli's books through the investigation of what he calls 'ricerca di assoluto', an issue that he traces throughout the writer's career. Both of these books investigate the constant connection between Tondelli's life and his literary works. They thoroughly analyse some of his recurrent themes, such as the separation and the journey, and underline the writer's obstinate devotion to life, continuously expressed through the practice of writing. The regular presence of these themes gives Tondelli's production the shape of an ambitious but unfinished *Bildungsroman* whose main feature is the original reworking of all the genre's traditional elements. Paolo Mauri, reviewing *Camere separate*, underlines this feature:

I primi libri di Tondelli rivelavano l'adulto imbozzolato nel ragazzo, qui l'adulto Tondelli copre dentro di sé l'adolescente e per l'appunto si misura con i "grandi temi" tipici di quell'età: grandi amori delusi, Dio, la morte, la ricerca di un'identità, e sotto a tutto una disperata richiesta d'affetto e di diritto ad esistere.<sup>4</sup>

This complex and sometimes contradictory humanity is traced back by Carnero to an emotional but fundamentally secular dimension, whilst Spadaro prefers to attribute it to a certain underlying religious aspect of Tondelli's works.

The two volumes of Tondelli's works edited by Fulvio Panzeri and published by Bompiani in 2000 and 2001 constitute an extremely important step

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Spadaro, *Pier Vittorio Tondelli. Attraversare l'attesa*, Reggio Emilia, Diabasis, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Paolo Mauri, 'Libertino innamorato', *La Repubblica*, 2 June 1989, p. 30.



towards the systematization of the writer's total output.<sup>5</sup> Their publication within a series of literary classics testifies to the literary status attained by the writer, who appears now to be free once and for all of labels such as 'gay writer' or 'Movement writer'. The greatest merit of these two volumes is the thoroughness and care of their critical apparatus. The introductory essays by Panzeri and the sections of 'Note ai testi'—which contain preparatory notes, reviews and the writer's letters and commentaries on his own books—are precious tools for the reconstruction of Tondelli's writing process. The first volume—*Romanzi, teatro, racconti*—is completely devoted to Tondelli's fictional writings, whilst the second—*Cronache, saggi, conversazioni*—collects his non-fictional works.

In 2002, Giulio Iacoli published his *Atlante delle derive*.<sup>6</sup> Iacoli's book offers a new perspective on Tondelli's works by documenting the relation between the geographical and psychological space of the region of Emilia and the author's personality. New concepts, such as those of 'in-scape' and 'smellscape', principally utilized in the field of human geography, are productively applied to the analysis of Tondelli's books. His balance between the province and a more international dimension, along with his evaluation of the issue of provinciality, are thoroughly investigated. Iacoli, however, does not fully explain the peculiar dialectic of internationalism-provincialism in Tondelli or examine in detail the particular forms of intertextual relations between his works and various non-Italian texts. Another important recent title is Enrico Minardi's *Pier Vittorio*

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<sup>5</sup> *Opere I. Romanzi, teatro, racconti* and *Opere II. Cronache, saggi, conversazioni*, ed. by Fulvio Panzeri, Milan, Bompiani, 2000-2001.

<sup>6</sup> Giulio Iacoli, *Atlante delle derive. Geografie da un'Emilia postmoderna: Gianni Celati e Pier Vittorio Tondelli*, Reggio Emilia, Diabasis, 2002.

*Tondelli*, a general overview of the writer's career.<sup>7</sup> In 2005 Enrico Palandri published *Pier. Tondelli e la generazione*, which, in the words of its author, treats Tondelli not as 'l'oggetto, piuttosto l'interlocutore di queste pagine. Per me, il segnale più convincente dei suoi meriti sta nella curiosità che le sue opere ancora suscitano nei lettori d'oggi'.<sup>8</sup>

The sustained critical attention that Tondelli and his writings have received constitutes both an advantage and a problem. The advantage is that there has been a persistent and ever-growing attention towards his work. The problem is that it has become hard to separate the work itself from the figure of the author and the latter has tended to be reshaped—through a questionable critical operation—into a generational and cultural myth, regardless of the literary limitations inevitably connected to the writer's brief career. Jennifer Burns underlines this problem when she writes that

Biography seems to be a further obstacle to critical clarity. Tondelli published first in 1980 and died in 1991, probably of AIDS, the disease with which 1980s youth culture was branded. He appears to encapsulate all too neatly a decade which he spent much of his creative energy expressing and analysing, hence the risk of reading him according to a cultural stereotype, ticking off individual texts against a check-list of 1980s cultural phenomena.<sup>9</sup>

As a result of this problem, I have considered it essential to make an original and impartial evaluation of Tondelli's works based on the analysis of their intertextual relations with diverse sources, models and analogues.

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<sup>7</sup> Enrico Minardi, *Pier Vittorio Tondelli*, Florence, Cadmo, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Enrico Palandri, *Pier. Tondelli e la generazione*, Rome, Laterza, 2005, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000*, Leeds, Northern Universities Press, 2001, p. 118.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first part of Chapter 1—*Postmodernity, Intertextuality and Hybridity*—deals with those aspects of the concepts of the postmodern and intertextuality that apply in particular to Tondelli. The second part deals with the writings of Alberto Arbasino, one of the exponents of the Neoavanguardia, which have been regarded as an early example of postmodern intertextual practice in Italy, and then focuses briefly on *Un weekend postmoderno*, a collection of articles and essays, which is also a helpful source for gaining an insight into Tondelli's fiction.

The second chapter—*The Emotional Writing of 'Altri libertini' and 'Pao Pao'*—is focused on Tondelli's first two books, which are both characterized by an intense emotional charge. The dialectics of space and borders—which are reworked by the writer according to a personal perspective—are essential elements of this chapter. The incessant wanderings of the characters in *Altri libertini* and the reshaping of the institutionalized space of the barracks according to the needs and desires of Tondelli's young soldiers testify to the plasticity of the idea of space. The examples of Hubert Selby Jr. and the Beat Generation in *Altri libertini* and of unorthodox examples of military literature in *Pao Pao* strongly influence Tondelli's literary choices around the years of his narrative debut.

The third chapter—*Ersatz Realities: 'Dinner Party' and 'Rimini'*—mainly deals with Tondelli's most controversial novel, *Rimini*. After an analysis of *Dinner Party*, his only effort as a playwright, which already contains some of the characteristics of *Rimini*, especially those connected to the ideas of hyper-reality and the permeability of cultural borders and information exchanges, the chapter shifts its focus to Tondelli's 1985 novel. This book, strongly influenced in its

themes and atmospheres by Raymond Chandler's noir novels, is an interesting example of Tondelli's talent as a mainstream writer. The project behind the book is that of creating the first best-seller in Tondelli's career as a professional writer. The book is a decisive step towards the writer's most ambitious book, *Camere separate*, to which most of the following chapter is dedicated.

The fourth chapter—*A Single Man: 'Biglietti agli amici' and 'Camere separate'*—focuses on Tondelli's 'phenomenology of desertion'. The constant pondering over the themes of separation and departure and the working out of a new 'poetica del frammento' characterize the last narrative efforts of the writer who died two years after the publication of *Camere separate*. The project of publishing a private book such as *Biglietti agli amici*, almost completely composed of quotations from other books, testifies to a shift in Tondelli's literary interests. The works of Ingeborg Bachmann and Peter Handke, or the more intimate prose of Christopher Isherwood, will have a lasting influence on his last novel.

Finally the *Conclusion* will draw together the main arguments and findings of the thesis.

## CHAPTER 1

### Postmodernity, Intertextuality and Space

Le razze diventano popolo, il popolo uno, sempre più uguale,  
sempre più diverso. Nella Pianura Progressiva cambiano le facce  
ed i mestieri, rimane al fondo una sensazione che sbilancia.  
(Giovanni Lindo Ferretti, CCCP)<sup>1</sup>

This first chapter starts with a discussion of two bodies of theory—that of the postmodern and of intertextuality—which I draw on in the thesis to help frame and analyse Tondelli's writing. I highlight in particular here four aspects of postmodern theory: the recasting of the relationship between the local and the global, the end of grand narratives, the use of parody and pastiche and the collapse of the distinction between high and low culture. The chapter then moves on to a discussion of the works of the Neoavanguardia and in particular of Alberto Arbasino, who can be regarded as an exemplar of a particular kind of early postmodern textual practice in Italy that would be influential on Tondelli. Finally, it examines the main features of *Un weekend postmoderno*, a collection of articles and essays by Tondelli which is also a precious source of insight into his fictional works.

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Lindo Ferretti, *Libretto Rozzo*, Florence, Giunti, 1998.

### Components of the postmodern

The dialectic between localism and cosmopolitanism marks an important aspect of Tondelli's works, which seem suspended between the province and a more global dimension. His books have been influenced by the new relationship between the local and the global as it has been recast by postmodernism. They are not characterized by the old neat distinction between provinciality and cosmopolitanism, but rather by the impression of living in a borderland between the modern and the postmodern, the local and the global. The postmodern era is characterized by the globalization of cultures, races, images, capital and products. Nation-state identities, which were the foundation of the modern era, are reworked and transformed by the dissemination of images and information across national boundaries and also by a sense of mixing and erosion of national and cultural identities on a scale unknown to the earlier societies of modernity. Living on the edge between the old and the new creates tension, insecurity, confusion, as well as excitement and exhilaration. All the feelings relative to the reworking of space in postmodernity can be found in Tondelli's books where they are also variously connected to the different kinds of intertextual relations that his texts establish with other texts. To different spatial relations correspond different intertexts. In *Altri libertini* (1980) and *Pao Pao* (1982) we have two opposite spatial dimensions. In the former a centrifugal force scatters the characters far from their provincial reality whilst in the latter the author places them—as we will see in Chapter 2—in a heterotopia: the barracks, a place characterized by a strong centripetal force. The vastness and chaos of the open space in *Altri libertini* is represented on an intertextual level by lexical creolization and direct quotations,

mainly of American pop songs, while the forced and enclosed space of *Pao Pao* seems to subdue even the intertextual relations of the book. In *Rimini* (1985) the transformation of the city into a tentacular hyper-reality influences the use of pastiche and direct parallels with other texts and genres and in *Camere separate* (1989) the internalization of the surrounding space is represented on an intertextual level by self-quotations and stylistic equivalences with minimalist music and writers representative of Tondelli's newly-developed 'poetica del frammento'.

The spatial and textual variations that can be found in Tondelli's books may be seen as the result of the general disorder created by the collapse of grand narratives, a concept derived, as discussed below, from the work of Jean-François Lyotard. A grand narrative or *grand récit* can be defined as a totalizing story that orders and explains knowledge and experience within a certain society.<sup>2</sup> The issue of order is a central one within modernity, conventionally associated with rationality and the creation of order out of chaos. A rationalized and ordered society is a well-functioning one and the constant pursuit of ever-increasing levels of order justifies modern societies' suspicion towards anything that can be labelled 'disorder'. This continuous opposition between 'order' and 'disorder'—which is temporarily resolved by the assertion of the superiority of 'order' over chaos—implies that society itself has to create those things that can represent 'disorder' within itself. Therefore it continually creates and constructs 'disorder' by attributing negative and chaotic features to what could be labelled as 'other'—

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<sup>2</sup> John Stephens, and Robyn McCallum *Retelling Stories. Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*, New York & London, Garland, 1998.

the non-white, non-rational, non-heterosexual and so on. The creation of the categories of 'order' and 'disorder' helps society achieve and maintain stability.

Lyotard equates the idea of stability with that of totality. According to him the three staples of modern societies—order, stability and totality—are represented and preserved by means of the *grands récits* that a culture tells itself about its beliefs and values. Lyotard argues that all aspects of modern societies are dependent on these grand narratives—also known as 'meta-narratives' or 'master narratives'—and that postmodernism can ultimately be summed up as a sentiment of incredulity towards them.<sup>3</sup> Postmodernism is the critique of meta-narratives. It brings forward the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization. If every attempt to create 'order' always demands the creation of an equal amount of 'disorder', then the role of grand narratives is to mask the artificiality of these two categories by explaining that 'order' really is rational and good and 'disorder' really is chaotic and bad. Postmodernism—employing mass and pop culture and not just avant-garde and high-brow culture as in the modernist age—questions the validity of these grand narratives in favour of *petits récits*—mini-narratives—stories that refers to small practices and local events rather than large-scale or global concepts and that make no claim to universality, transcendent truth or stability.

The collapse of grand narratives and the emphasis on localism and difference at the expense of the old nation-state can be regarded as two staples of postmodernism as opposed to modernism. Many aspects of the postmodern aesthetic—such as the use of parody and pastiche and the breakdown between

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979.



high and low forms of expression—can be found in Tondelli and are closely related to the peculiar intertextual properties of his works. Parody tends towards a double or contradictory stance on any statement. It creates self-undermining statements by citing something with the intention of making fun of it. Linda Hutcheon considers parody central to postmodernism and insists that such an ironic stance on representation, genre and ideology has a deep political meaning because it has the capacity to unsettle all doxa. Parody ‘de-doxifies’—as Hutcheon puts it—and deconstructs all accepted beliefs and ideologies. She argues that the willingness to play with society’s contradictions means that ‘parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies’.<sup>4</sup> Postmodern parody not only questions society’s contradictions, it also forces us to challenge traditional assumptions about the aesthetic product such as: 1) the notion of artistic originality; 2) the idea that subjectivity is stable and coherent; 3) the capitalist principles of intellectual property and artistic ownership; 4) all the contentions that meaning and identity are natural and not artificial; 5) the belief in the possibility of assuming a neutral or non-ideological position over something; 6) the illusion that it is possible to know history the way it really was, and 7) the claim that it is possible to preserve an autonomous and yet effective realm for the aesthetic product which is separate from the mass audience.

Hutcheon’s understanding of postmodern parody is in contrast with Fredric Jameson’s idea of ‘pastiche’. Whereas Hutcheon sees much value in postmodern parodic stance—finding an implicit political critique and historical

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London, Routledge, 1989, p. 101.

awareness in it—Jameson sees postmodernism as characterized by ‘blank parody’, without any political bite. According to him parody has been replaced by pastiche which is

like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction [...] Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs.<sup>5</sup>

Jameson sees this turn to ‘blank parody’ as a reaction to modernism where each individual author was characterized by his unique ‘inimitable’ style. In postmodern pastiche, by contrast, individual styles become simply a series of different codes, which leave behind them

a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm. Faceless masters continue to inflect the [...] strategies which constrain our existences, but no longer need to impose their speech [...] and the postliteracy of the late capitalist world reflects, not only the absence of any great collective project, but also the unavailability of the older national language itself.<sup>6</sup>

Postmodern cultural productions therefore are ultimately a cannibalization of all past styles and a play with random stylistic allusions. The main consequence of such a world of pastiche is the loss of the connection to history, a state of things that Jameson defines as ‘historical deafness’. Jameson sees this situation as a ‘symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing

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<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London and New York, Verso, 1991, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

history in some active way'.<sup>7</sup> The fascination exercised by styles and fashions from the past over postmodern culture often takes the form of a use of quotations out of their original context. An example of this tendency in Tondelli is his use of canonical poetry in *Altri libertini*, discussed in the next chapter. This does not mean that in the postmodern age there is no attempt towards the recuperation of historicity. On the contrary, Jameson sees postmodern theory itself as a desperate endeavour to make sense of the age, but in a way that refuses the traditional forms of understanding, such as narrative or history. For postmodernists everything is encompassed by ideology and textuality to the point that they question the existence of any truth outside of culture. Jameson sees this situation as a symptom of the age connected to what he calls 'late capitalism'. As he writes: 'postmodernism is not the cultural dominant of a wholly new social order [...], but only the reflex and the concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself'.<sup>8</sup>

Another important feature of the postmodern aesthetic is the breakdown of the distinction between high and low cultural forms. Even though some modernists (such as Joyce and Eliot) had already incorporated elements of popular culture (e.g. songs, romantic fiction) into their works, they tended to maintain within their texts an implicit hierarchy of high and low forms and to be idiosyncratic and hard to follow in their experiments. By contrast, postmodernists employ pop culture in more immediate and understandable ways. Jameson illustrates this state of affairs by drawing attention to what he considers to be a fundamental feature of postmodernism, namely

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. xii.

the effacement [...] of the older frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, categories, and contents of that very Culture Industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern [...]. The postmoderns have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called para-literature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer simply 'quote', as Joyce [...] might have done, but incorporate into their very substance.<sup>9</sup>

Hutcheon similarly emphasizes how one of the distinguishing features of postmodernism is its relation to mass culture. She underlines the radicalism of modernism by stressing the way it

defined itself through the exclusion of mass culture and was driven, by its fear of contamination by the consumer culture burgeoning around it, into an elitist and exclusive view of aesthetic formalism and the autonomy of art.<sup>10</sup>

Modernists—she points out—often pursued radical change without acknowledging the elitist and totalitarian nature of their positions and with no consideration of their potential fall into extremist stances such as fascism, futurism, anarchism and primitivism. On the contrary postmodern works are not afraid to renegotiate the various relations—either of complicity or critique—that high culture can establish with popular forms of culture. In *The Politics of Postmodernism* Hutcheon considers postmodern photography to be a perfect example of this newly-developed relation between high and low culture because

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Hutcheon, p. 28.

photography moves out of the territories of hermeticism and narcissism—typical of modernist self-reflexivity—into the social and mass cultural world. Visual culture—through films, photography and the graphic novel—is predominant in the postmodern age: hence the importance attributed to visuality by many postmodern authors, Tondelli included. Another symptom of the centrality of visual art forms is the general breakdown of narrative linearity and temporality. This tendency is usually referred—by Baudrillard and others—to the loss of connection to reality and history. The notion of ‘simulacrum’—something that replaces reality with its representation and which will be central in my discussion of *Rimini*—is a first result of this state of things. Baudrillard defines the ‘simulacrum’ as no longer a matter of imitation, duplication or parody, but as a question of substitution of the signs of the real for the real.<sup>11</sup> Jameson provides a similar definition when he writes that the simulacrum’s ‘peculiar function lies in what Sartre would have called the *derealization* of the whole surrounding world of everyday reality’.<sup>12</sup>

The dissolution of the boundary between high and low culture and the use of pastiche, recycled materials and quotations make it no longer possible in the postmodern age to speak of originality or uniqueness of the artistic object, be it a painting or a novel, since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from elements of already existent art. The notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life find a fruitful ‘umbrella term’ in the idea of *intertextuality*.

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacre et simulations*, Paris, Galilée, 1981.

<sup>12</sup> Jameson, p. 34.

### Intertextuality

The relationship between two or more texts and the intricate web of references and connections that link one text or writer to another, to other artistic outputs, or even to events outside the text, had been analysed in many critical studies well before such relationships began to be regarded as manifestations of intertextuality. The notion of intertextuality, however, goes beyond earlier ways of conceptualizing connections and influences. Whereas these approaches tended to treat individual texts as relatively discrete entities, the notion of intertextuality involves a view of texts as *already necessarily* connected to one another in a textual *field*, a ‘croisement de surfaces textuelles’<sup>13</sup>, since language itself, in its social manifestations, is constituted out of dialogues and entwinements.

The concept of intertextuality has its origins within the realm of twentieth-century semiology, the science that, according to the classic definition by Ferdinand de Saussure, studies ‘la vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale’<sup>14</sup>, where literature is only one of the possible fields of application. The very constitutional elements of semiology, with their all-encompassing notions of ‘text’ and ‘culture’, involve intertextuality as a constant dialectic among texts, here regarded as the various organisations of symbols within that wider system of signs called ‘culture’. Saussure imagines signs as two-sided coins combining a *signifié* (concept) and a *signifiant* (sound-image). After Saussure, the linguistic sign is no longer a unitary, stable unit and can only be understood when placed into that network of relations, similarities and differences that constitutes the synchronic

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<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Le mot, le dialogue et le roman’ in *Σημειωτική. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1969, p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (1915), ed. by Tullio De Mauro, Paris, Payot, 1972, p. 33

system of language. Whilst this consideration is true for all linguistic signs, many critics after Saussure have underlined how it is even truer for the literary sign in particular. Every literary author has to face at least two different synchronic systems of language: language in general, and the more specific system of literary language from which s/he borrows not only words but also characters, plots, narrative devices, phrases and sentences taken from previous texts. Dialogism is therefore a constitutive element of all language, including literary language, and the studies of Mikhail Bakhtin on polyphony and heteroglossia in the novel are central in order to understand the notion of intertextuality itself.

The novel, for Bakhtin, uncovers the formative principle of discourse, its relational and dialogical capacities, without presenting some final absolute language of truth. The novel develops into a whole that includes various viewpoints. To use the words of Ernst Cassirer, it encompasses ‘the *thing seen* as well as the manner and the direction of the *seeing*’.<sup>15</sup> No individual perspective is adequate to represent the whole itself; only the totality of perspectives is able to embody it. Heteroglossia—a language’s ability to contain within itself many voices—works like a set of mirrors facing each other. Each mirror reflects only a tiny piece of the world and the inter-reflecting aspects of the mirrors force us to guess that the totality is broader—‘multi-levelled’ and ‘multi-horized’ in Bakhtin’s words—than it would be if we had only one mirror, one perspective and one language.

Bakhtin’s vision of the text is a social one and the novelist becomes in his critical writings the heir of an anti-authoritarian cultural strategy to debase the

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<sup>15</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. by Mario Domandi, Oxford, Blackwell, 1963, p. 32.

pretensions of the official language and ideology and institute a collective learning process. Bakhtin's dialogic vision of human consciousness, subjectivity and communication is based on a vision in which language embodies an ongoing dialogic clash of ideologies, world-views, opinions and interpretations. In this respect, it can be distinguished from a poststructuralist vision, which attributes its notion of agency to language itself rather than to human agents. The two opposing poles in Bakhtin's vision are, on the one hand, the forces of cultural centralization and stabilization—the unitary language, the literary canon and so on—and on the other the decentralizing influence of popular culture—the grotesque, ridicule, parody and the anti-canonical novel. The new novel envisaged by Bakhtin parodies the traditional canon of literary genres and ridicules the official culture's claims to universal validity. It is thus the literary expression of a whole socio-cultural process, to which different labels have been attached with varying degrees of conceptual accuracy. Among these labels the two terms *monologic* and *dialogic* are probably the best known. The former refers to a mono-accentual discourse and to an authoritarian attitude towards other potential discourses. The latter denotes instead a multi-accentual discourse and pays attention to the discourse's relational capacities with other discourses.

The writings of Bakhtin—and especially his work on dialogism—strongly influenced the works of Julia Kristeva, one of the first writers to introduce Bakhtin's theories to the West. Her insistence upon the importance of the speaking subject as the primary object for linguistic analysis is rooted in the concept of dialogism and in her own active dialogue with Bakhtin's texts. In her 1966 essay 'Le mot, le dialogue et le roman' Kristeva uses for the first time the



term ‘intertextuality’—a term that Todorov claims is the French translation of Bakhtin’s Russian word for ‘dialogism’.<sup>16</sup> Kristeva’s intertextuality is founded on Bakhtin’s idea that all discourse is potentially ‘dialogic’ or ‘double’ and it is an intertwining of at least two voices that reiterate what has been already said or put on paper. Nothing is written—or spoken—for the first time for, as Todorov writes

After Adam, there are no nameless objects nor any unused words. Intentionally or not, all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as with discourses yet to come, whose reactions it foresees and anticipates.<sup>17</sup>

According to Kristeva, Bakhtin saw the literary word as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than as a fixed point or meaning. It is a dialogue among various texts: the writer’s, the character’s, and the historical cultural context. Each word (or text) is an intersection of words or texts where at least one other word or text can be read; the horizontal axis composed of the writer-character intersects the vertical axis composed of the text-context.

Bakhtine est l’un des premiers à remplacer le découpage statique des textes par un modèle où la structure littéraire *n’est* pas, mais où elle *s’élabore* par rapport à une *autre* structure. Cette dynamisation du structuralisme n’est possible qu’à partir d’une conception selon laquelle le “mot littéraire” n’est pas un *point* (un sens fixe), mais un *croisement de surfaces* textuelles, un dialogue de plusieurs écritures: de l’écrivain, du destinataire (ou du personnage), du contexte culturel actuel ou antérieur. [...] les trois dimensions de l’espace textuel dans lequel vont se réaliser les différentes opérations des ensembles sémiologiques et des séquences poétiques [...] sont: le sujet de l’écriture, le destinataire et les textes extérieurs (trois éléments en dialogue). Le statut du mot se définit alors a) *horizontalement*: le mot dans le texte appartient à la fois au sujet de l’écriture et au destinataire, et b) *verticalement*: le mot dans le texte est orienté vers le

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<sup>16</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin. The Dialogical Principle*, trans. by Wlad Godzich, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. x.

corpus littéraire antérieur ou synchronique. [...] Chez Bakhtine d'ailleurs, ces deux axes, qu'il appelle respectivement *dialogue* et *ambivalence*, ne sont pas clairement distingués. Mais ce manque de rigueur est plutôt une découverte que Bakhtine est le premier à introduire dans la théorie littéraire: tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte. A la place de la notion d'intersubjectivité s'installe celle d'*intertextualité*, et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme *double*.<sup>18</sup>

If all texts are characterized by their double and dialogic nature, then intertextuality, rather than an exception, must be an intrinsic and normal property of texts. The monologic text does not normally exist and it can only be perceived when the true polyphonic nature of a text is consciously suppressed. Furthermore, Kristeva is careful to mark the difference between her vision of intertextuality and the older idea of literary 'influence'. A text is not made intertextual by the number of overt cross-references that can be found in it. The notions of imitation and influence tend to suggest a closed set of one-way relations between Author/Text A and Author/Text B whereas the idea of intertextuality presupposes that many texts (not just A and B) circulate in an open field and engage in dialogue with one another. By saying this, Kristeva manages to shift the literary focus from the authors to the texts themselves and specifically to the relations among them. Among the possible intertextual relations she mentions at the beginning of her essay, we have:

**1. Imitation.** When an author takes seriously another author's text and aims to reproduce it;

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<sup>18</sup> Kristeva, pp. 144-6.

**2. Parody.** When an author takes another author's text and introduces an opposite meaning to that of the original with a comic or debasing intent;

**3. Hidden inner polemic.** When an author, in implicit polemic with another text, produces a hidden critique of it in his/her own work.

Each one of these intertextual relations implies the coexistence of a borrowing from another text—what Kristeva calls an 'absorption'—and a reworking of it according to the sensibility of the borrowing author, his or her readership and the cultural context. The constant dialogue among texts also brings forth the intertwining of different voices, thus determining the polyphonic nature of a prose text. According to Bakhtin, the characters and narrators of a novel are known and recognized by their own voices, rather than by any other features and it is the way in which these voices are arranged that establishes whether or not a work can be regarded as polyphonic. A novel developed on this principle is thus an egalitarian one because in it equality of utterance is central: the narrator and the characters are on the same level and we cannot see any difference of status between them. Characters are treated as subjects rather than objects manipulated by an omniscient narrator:

The direct and fully weighted signifying power of the characters' word destroys the monologic plane of the novel and calls forth an unmediated response—as if the character were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual world.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 5.

This autonomous existence gives the reader the chance of establishing a dialogue with the characters and of freely connecting and disconnecting stories and details.

The prominence attributed to the reader and his/her capacity to connect and disconnect elements in a story is also given great importance in the work of Roland Barthes. For Barthes the key to an understanding of intertextuality is the need to get away from a modernist view of the text. This is why in his account the traditional terms 'text' and 'work' are given new definitions.

Une œuvre est un objet fini, computable, qui peut occuper un espace physique (prendre place par exemple sur les rayons d'une bibliothèque) ; le texte est un champ méthodologique ; on ne peut donc dénombrer (du moins régulièrement) des textes ; tout ce qu'on peut dire, c'est que, dans telle ou telle œuvre, il y a (ou il n'y a pas) *du* texte : « L'œuvre se tient dans la main, le texte dans le langage. »<sup>20</sup>

The text is a process in signification rather than a medium within which meaning is secured and stabilized. Writing, for Barthes, opens the sign up to what Derrida calls an 'explosion' and a 'dissemination' of already existent meaning. The dialogic discourse of Bakhtin becomes, in the hands of Barthes, a vision of the text where no word has a univocal meaning. In such a text the reader does not discover meaning, but follows it as it passes by and flows, explodes and regresses. Barthes's theory of the text, therefore, involves a theory of intertextuality because the text not only sets in motion a plurality of meanings, but is also woven out of numerous discourses and spun from already existent meaning. For Barthes the intertextual text is

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<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Théorie du texte', *Encyclopaedia universalis*, vol. 15 (1977), pp. 1013-17, p. 1015.

entièrement tissée de citations, de références, d'échos : langages culturels (quel langage ne le serait pas ?), antécédents ou contemporains, qui le traversent de part en part dans une vaste stéréophonie. L'intertextuel dans lequel est pris tout texte, puisqu'il est lui-même l'entre-texte d'un autre texte, ne peut se confondre avec quelque origine du texte : rechercher les « sources », les « influences » d'une œuvre, c'est satisfaire au mythe de la filiation ; les citations dont est fait un texte sont anonymes, irrepérables et cependant *déjà lues* : ce sont des citations sans guillemets.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst Kristeva thought of the reader as an absent mediator, for Barthes s/he is not a passive vehicle, but rather the regent of the text. The author then is a compiler of the already written and the text is 'a tissue, a woven fabric'.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of the text, and thus of intertextuality, depends, as Barthes argues, on the figure of the web, the weave, the garment woven from the threads of the 'already written' and the 'already read'. Every text has its meaning, therefore in relation to other texts.<sup>23</sup>

It is important for Barthes to acknowledge that the textual meaning is not created by an *Author-God* who combines a signifier and a signified. To say that a text is constructed from a mosaic of quotations does not mean it is possible to find a text's pre-texts and then regard them as the signified of the text's signifiers. The other works of literature and/or other kinds of texts that it quotes are themselves intertextual constructs, with nothing more to offer us than other signifiers. The continuous chase that the reader has to face ultimately constitutes the very pleasure of the text. As Mary Orr writes:

If Barthes's inter-textuality is then [...] divergence and diversion, reader satisfaction with the text's seduction and siren call is of paramount importance. Indeed, one of the key terms Barthes employs to describe this

<sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes, 'De l'œuvre au texte', *Revue d'esthétique*, no. 3 (1971), pp. 225-32, p. 229.

<sup>22</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath, London, Fontana, 1977, p. 159.

<sup>23</sup> Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 6.

state is 'dérive', usually translated as drift (as for ships off course, or continents). [...] the 'dérive' is lack of fixity and direction. [...] the Barthesian 'dérive' ultimately describes the very pleasure of the text going against the [...] grain [...] with all the incestuous, Oedipal titillations of totem and taboo.<sup>24</sup>

*The Beginnings of a Postmodern Literary Practice in Italy: the Neoavanguardia.*

*Arbasino and the 'gita a Chiasso'*

In Italy the ideas connected to postmodernity and intertextuality exerted a strong influence on the Neoavanguardia, whose heart was the Gruppo 63, which consisted of a varied set of writers who shared the will to recover the lessons of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde and to oppose the style and ideology associated with neorealism through a renewed connection with European, and especially French, culture. Maria Luisa Vecchi underlines the group's connection to

esperienze della cultura europea e mondiale, dal formalismo di Sklovskij alla fenomenologia di Husserl e di Merleau-Ponty, alle teorie musicali e sociologiche di Adorno, allo strutturalismo di De Saussure, alla semiologia di Barthes, all'*école du regard* di Robbe-Grillet [...] inoltre queste esperienze vengono messe a frutto: la ricerca, il dibattito, la teoria hanno riscontro sul piano della produzione di testi.<sup>25</sup>

The opposition to what was considered a deteriorated form of literary production was just about total. The group's activists categorically asserted their nature as cultural agitators in perfect harmony with the modern, metropolitan and mechanized world, a world thus opposed to the rural dimension of the earlier modern Italian novel. Another main point of dissent was over the issue of content.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Orr, *Intertextuality. Debates and Contexts*, Cambridge, Polity, 2003, p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Maria Luisa Vecchi, *Arbasino*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1980, p. 45.

While the earlier novel favours a well-constructed plot, sustained by a lyricism associated with the aesthetics of Croce, the Neoavanguardia appeared to be completely focused on style and structure: a book's content progressively lost its value to the point of becoming a mere pretext. This requirement of a radical literary renewal had in Alberto Arbasino one of its most original and effective practitioners.

On 23 January 1963, Alberto Arbasino published 'La gita a Chiasso', an article in *Il Giorno* that can be considered fundamental to understanding the centrality for the Neoavanguardia of a sharp and decisive turn away from Italian provincialism. Sustained by a strong moralism, in line with Lombardy's satirical tradition running through Giuseppe Parini and Carlo Porta, Arbasino criticizes the backwardness of Italian intellectuals who, since the 1930s, have consciously condemned national culture to isolation and ignorance. He writes:

Perché [...] noi che non ne abbiamo nessuna colpa dobbiamo ancora star male e soffrir sempre pene gravissime in conseguenza del fatto che un gruppetto di letterati autodidatti negli anni Trenta invece di studiarsi qualche grammatica straniera e di fare qualche gita a Chiasso a comprarsi un po' di libri importanti tradotti e discussi da noi solo adesso [...] abbia buttato via i trent'anni migliori della vita umana lamentandosi a vuoto e perdendo del tempo a inventare la ruota o a scoprire il piano inclinato mentre altrove già si marciava in treno e in dirigibile, o almeno si lavorava utilmente in vista dei decenni futuri? Bastava arrivare fino alla stanga della dogana di Ponte Chiasso, due ore di bicicletta da Milano, e pregare un qualche contrabbandiere di [...] acquistare, insieme [...] a un paio di pacchetti di Muratti col filtro, anche i *Manoscritti economico-filosofici* di Marx (1844), il *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* di Wittgenstein (1921), *Civiltà di massa e cultura di minoranza* del Dottor Leavis (1930), le *Idee per una fenomenologia* di Husserl (1931), e magari *I principi della critica letteraria* di I.A. Richards (1928), *Cultura e ambiente* di Leavis e Thompson (1933) [...] *Axel's Castle* di Edmund Wilson (1931) [...] *Capire la poesia* di Cleanth Brooks e R. Penn Warren (1938) [...] un po' di Blanchot e Bataille assortiti [...] e il meglio di Forster, dai romanzi intorno al 1910 ai saggi del 1936, passando per il *Passaggio in India* che è

del 1924. Ci si sarebbero risparmiate alcune decine d'anni di penose indecisioni intorno a illusioni senza avvenire [...] e soprattutto la scomodità dell'apprendistato coi capelli bianchi.<sup>26</sup>

According to Arbasino, Italian literature is doomed by backwardness and provincialism; writers continue to use the same structures of Baroque oratory, but further complicated and confused by all the different philosophical trends piled up with the passing of time. The texts become convoluted clutters of impressions, symbols and mysterious intuitions:

Da quando in qua si scrive in quel modo? [...] non vedo [...] perché dovrei far degli sforzi per decifrare gli eccessi di auto-indulgenza di alcuni vanesii minori che si abbandonano alla incomunicabilità della “prima stesura” per non far la fatica di chiarire il proprio pensiero neanche a se stessi, senza preoccuparsi se la confusione stilistica è il segno più certo di confusione nella testa.<sup>27</sup>

As a reaction to this state of affairs, Arbasino opts for an ostentatious form of xenophilia which characterizes his entire production, from his fiction to his all-comprehensive *Kulturkritik*.

Since his debut book, the 1957 collection of short stories *Le piccole vacanze*, Arbasino's literary profile has acquired a series of distinctive traits when compared to the rest of the cultural context. Far from any attempt at realism, he succeeds in creating small, volatile episodes, because what is important is to

Acchiappare le immagini come si suol fare con le prime farfalle, montarle con meno parole che sia possibile, usar pochi colori e unire l'eleganza al libertinaggio in una nube di polvere di riso [...] senza toccare, in verità, né

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<sup>26</sup> Alberto Arbasino, 'La gita a Chiasso', *Riga 18: Alberto Arbasino*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti and Elio Grazioli, Milan, Marcos y Marcos, 2001, pp. 39-42 (pp. 39-40).

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.



l'anima né il cuore. Il fascino deve operare altrove, nelle ragioni della sensibilità dove ha origine quel che si chiama comunemente lo spirito.<sup>28</sup>

The book is full of Proustian echoes and the author exploits all his literary reminiscences as a premeditated, intellectual trick. All the materials connected to the field of memory are usually placed in inverted commas, a contrivance which involves the reader in an ambiguous game: on the one hand, the author seems to charge these elements with a particularly emphatic meaning; on the other, his understated tone automatically denies this emphasis. A good example of this expedient is the finale of the first story, a sardonic farewell to youth (now lost, but never really regretted) in the manner of Manzoni's famous 'Addio ai monti':

Addio giallo paese che ricade nel sonno. Grand Hotel sepolcrale, ombroso parco spazzato dal vento, addio bosco tennis piscina ore pungenti, giorni che da oggi in poi rimpiangerò, addio legni marci graffiati coi chiodi, scritte di cuori e di evviva, cabine bucate per spiare le belle, addio orinatoio rugginoso, addio crocicchi illuminati, addio Casa Lunga, addio fiori scale orologio immobile giochi perduti; non sarò ragazzo mai più e neanch'io lo vorrei, però mi è piaciuto molto.<sup>29</sup>

The nagging repetition of 'addio' and the underplayed closing line—in accordance with the classical tradition of the *aprosdoketon*—make the authorial game clear. Also the mixing of canonical literature and one of Arbasino's characteristic lists of incongruous objects recalls the typical postmodern dissolution of the boundary between high and low culture.

Albeit in a strictly personal way, Arbasino contributed during the 1960s to the avant-garde's struggle against provincialism. With Giorgio Manganelli, Umberto Eco and Alfredo Giuliani he has in common the polemic against

<sup>28</sup> Alberto Arbasino, *Le piccole vacanze* [1957], Turin, Einaudi, 1971, p. 257.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

dogmatic philosophies and literary realism, and the disagreement with the earlier generation of post-war intellectuals, who were accused of being too focused on literature's content, along with the radical rejection of any form of political engagement. This refusal has its historic roots in the ultimate collapse of the Resistance's ideals and Christian Democrat supremacy after the 1948 general election. It is also rooted in the political crisis in the Soviet Union, which followed the death of Stalin (1953) and the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU (1956). The latter event had a particular influence on the Italian left, because it marked both the failure of a political ideology and the decline of the literary forms of expression associated with it. It is not possible to identify, in the various issues of *Il Verri*, the review in which this debate on the autonomy or heteronomy of art was at its most intense, a clear stance against political commitment. The intellectuals of the Neoavanguardia did not have a precise code of practice on *disimpegno*: this might have been partly because of their fear of falling back, through a total denial of the need for practical reason in literature, into the territory of Croce's idealism. The Neoavanguardia was interested, rather, in attempting to mediate between autonomy and heteronomy, commitment and non-commitment.<sup>30</sup> As Renato Barilli asserts, it is impossible to believe that 'alla nascita dell'opera d'arte presieda solo il sentimento o solo una inventiva, una fantasia incondizionata o solo una sublime capacità artigianale'.<sup>31</sup> Any element can contribute to the construction of a work of art, which should always attempt to maintain a balance between practicality and abstraction. This perspective is also useful in explaining the highly diversified interests of Arbasino: literary criticism,

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<sup>30</sup> Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta*, Milan, Bompiani, 1962.

<sup>31</sup> Renato Barilli, 'Quale impegno?', *Il Verri*, no. 8 (1963), pp. 30-8 (p. 32).

theatre and cinema, fiction and non-fiction, articles on society—everything seems to be part of his horizon.

This rift between practicality and heteronomy in relation to reality is most evident in language. How is it possible to trust the official language which is arbitrarily chosen as the only valid option by abstract entities such as the academy or the intelligentsia? The official language is marked by a substantial ambiguity. On the one hand, it proposes itself as the only valid means of expression of reality. On the other, it builds up a hypocritical filter between the word and its meaning: whilst wanting to interpret reality, it mystifies it. The role of the writer should be to seize this language in order to unmask it. Since the re-shaping of a language is often the first step towards more profound social changes, for many avant-garde writers taking the official language off its hinges also meant the possibility of overturning reality itself.<sup>32</sup> In 1963 Robbe-Grillet wrote:

L'*engagement* è, per lo scrittore, la piena coscienza dei problemi attuali del suo proprio linguaggio, la convinzione della loro estrema importanza, la volontà di risolverli dall'interno. È questa per lui la sola possibilità di restare un artista e anche, senza dubbio, per via di conseguenza oscura e lontana, di servire un giorno, forse alla Rivoluzione stessa.<sup>33</sup>

This position is already anticipated by Arbasino in a 1960 article in *Il Verri* entitled 'I nipotini dell'ingegnere', where he asserts that linguistic distortion becomes necessary 'tutte le volte che la lingua diventa più stretta della vita'. One needs to be bold enough to refuse both the mystifying, cultured language and the everyday one, for both are incapable of capturing the multiform aspects of reality. This uninterrupted work on language-related issues is central to Arbasino's

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<sup>32</sup> Maria Corti, *Il viaggio testuale*, 1978.

<sup>33</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'Avanguardia e impegno', *Il Verri*, no. 10 (1963), pp. 51-7 (p. 57).

writings, no matter what they are about or what genre they belong to. Even though this theoretical interest is accentuated, his production is also characterized by a strong internal consistency, which is due to the constant inter-mingling between fictional suggestions and *Kulturkritik*. All his books appear to be based on a delicate inner balance and his attribute as an unconventional writer is a consequence of his tendency to encyclopaedism and linguistic paradox. One could say that Arbasino's work is a non-traditional balance between 'Progetto letterario e messa a punto del manufatto'.<sup>34</sup> It is the coherence of his project that is the main cause of Arbasino's progressive detachment from the contemporary literary scene, which he perceived as inadequate.

*L'Anonimo lombardo*, a perfect example of a meta-text controlled by an omniscient and intervening *Auctor*, is one of Arbasino's typical crucibles.<sup>35</sup> Footnotes, fragments of letters, literary criticism, melodrama, open confession, comedy, even a bit of poetry: all these elements are exposed to the reader. Even after a superficial reading, it is easy to identify two distinct pieces of work: on the one hand, an epistolary novel, which also constitutes the book's main structure, characterized by a certain rationalist control; on the other, a novel in footnotes, almost totally constructed out of quotations from other writers and full of ironic sentimentalism and romanticism. The book is thus the result of the constant tension between the core text and the notes or, as one critic has put it, between 'illuminismo e romanticismo dell'animo lombardo'.<sup>36</sup> About the structure of his own book Arbasino writes:

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<sup>34</sup> Vecchi, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Alberto Arbasino, *L'Anonimo lombardo* [1959], Turin, Einaudi, 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Elisabetta Bolla, *Invito alla lettura di Arbasino*, Milan, Mursia, 1979, p. 51.

In realtà, la Vera Protagonista è—come sempre—la Struttura [...] se si vuole razionalizzare oggi il senso più autentico di quella remota progettazione di trame. Si tratta in effetti non di un romanzetto ma di due doppi romanzetti: la prima coppia strettamente avvinghiata (la trama erotica si avviluppa alla trama della letterarietà per tutta l'estensione dell'opera), e la seconda coppia nettamente distinta in due romanzetti, perfettamente identici, di uguali dimensione e andazzo, e il secondo comincia dove finisce il primo, pressappoco a metà libro, con analogo inizio, *plot* e struttura affini, uguale conclusione, e una medesima inanità, giacché servono come mero supporto per le note, che costituiscono il vero romanzo.<sup>37</sup>

In Roberto, one of the book's main characters, it may be possible to identify an overt metaphor of Italy and its literary world: he is passionate and obtuse, incapable of any kind of irony, unable to distinguish between snobbery and refinement. As Luca Doninelli underlines:

Tanto più ricacciato nell'oscura provincia, quanto più desideroso di mondanità, Roberto incarna [...] l'Italia stessa e il suo carattere, riassunto dal Leopardi [...] con le crudeli parole: "...l'Italia è, quanto alle opinioni, a livello cogli altri popoli, eccetto una maggior confusione nelle idee, e una minor diffusione di cognizioni nelle classi popolari". La dimensione ironica, paradossale e insieme tragica de *L'Anonimo lombardo* si gioca [...] proprio qui.<sup>38</sup>

This parallel Roberto/Italy could also be helpful to explain some of the digressions on Italian literature contained in both the main plot and the novel's footnotes.<sup>39</sup> Essentially, what Arbasino argues here is that Italian literature seems willing to remain stuck in the structures of an archaic—or, more precisely, Arcadian—language which can be sacrificed only in the name of a mediocre and innocent invasion into the territories of rural sketchiness or for a false, American *koine*. Arbasino's linguistic choice is instead in favour of a recovery of the sound

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<sup>37</sup> Arbasino, pp. 204-5.

<sup>38</sup> Belpoliti and Grazioli, p. 225.

<sup>39</sup> See letters number XI, XIII, XIX and XLI.

of spoken Italian, through a variety of expedients including the use of slang and dialect, endless lists and incongruous accumulations. It is interesting to notice here that Tondelli, as we will see in the next chapter, uses the same expression, 'il *sound* dell'italiano parlato', in a 1980 essay, *Colpo d'oppio*, that can be considered one of his most important theoretical statements.

This constant formal elaboration is only one of the ways used by Arbasino to escape from the stifling provincial atmosphere of Italy. This need for a getaway, which infuses his entire production, is also expressed through the continuous rewriting and revision of his books: a practice that suggests the presence of a frantic, relentless movement towards a unspecified destination. As Peter Widdowson has suggested:

The term 're-vision' deploys a strategic ambiguity between the word *revise*: 'to examine and correct; to make a new, improved version of; to study anew', and *re-vision*: to see in another light; to re-envision or perceive differently; and thus to recast and re-evaluate the original.<sup>40</sup>

I think both meanings apply to Arbasino's works. This rewriting process does not only deal with the purely literary side of the author's personality; it also fosters certain ways of relating oneself to the world: it is the 'site of uneasy cultural struggle and a catalyst for change whose implications are ineluctably moral, ideological, and political'.<sup>41</sup> Arbasino is, in this sense, no exception.

The summa of his existential and physical wandering is *Fratelli d'Italia*, published in three different editions (1963, 1976, 1993) distinguished by their length and meaning. The book tracks the movement of a group of writers, artists

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Widdowson, *Literature*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 164.

<sup>41</sup> Michael E. Gerli, *Refiguring Authority: Reading, Writing, and Rewriting in Cervantes*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1995, p. 8.

and film-makers in and around Italy, and follows their artistic attempts and their discussions as they try to 'create'. However, whilst the first two editions can be considered as a chronicle of Italy's enthusiasm in the years of the economic 'boom', the third tends to be more of a historical novel, with a greater emphasis on those critical elements already outlined in the first two versions.<sup>42</sup> If *L'Anonimo lombardo* was a remarkable mixture of different styles and narrative structures *Fratelli d'Italia* is at the same time a novel and a diary, an essay and a piece of *Kulturkritik*; its uninterrupted *parlerie* and the impressive accumulation of cultural materials—to the point of taking up well over a thousand pages in the 1993 edition—are its most significant features. The main structure is that of the *voyage philosophique*, a choice that allows the writer to move freely between the fictional and the non-fictional plane and also provides him with the opportunity to use an extremely large number of quotations and references. The immediate sensation is of having to deal with an example of doubled writing, of a meta-narrative experiment, in debt to more than one literary model. As is his custom, Arbasino is not reluctant to give details and explanations about the project behind his books:

Nello schema iniziale dei *Fratelli d'Italia*, il gran tema del Viaggio [...] fatto coincidere con l'altro gran tema degli Anni d'Apprendistato, possibili solo una volta nella vita, negli anni "formativi" [...] secondo la tradizione del Bildungsroman tedesco, ma spezzati oggi [...] in settimane episodiche di apprendimenti frammentari e sfrenati...A questo Viaggio d'Apprendistato di scuola tedesca [...] corrisponde una struttura circolare, a grossi blocchi concentrici, dei quali l'ultimo si salda al primo—si torna al punto di partenza, però mutati e "conoscitivi" per sempre—secondo il modello della *Recherche* [...] Però un altro calco si è venuto sovrapponendo fin dall'inizio a quel tema Viaggio-più-Apprendistato, e

<sup>42</sup> The choice of the subtitle for the novel's second edition is indicative: 'La gran commedia dei nostri anni sessanta'.

alla sua struttura circolare; quello del coacervo [...] della Cena Letteraria, “erudita” e magari “epica”; ma se l’Epica corrisponde al Viaggio, che è volentieri picaresco, allora fra quali *generi* si collocherebbe un Itinerario eminentemente libresco e risolto quasi del tutto in *parlerie*?...Ecco [...] il romanzo-saggio trasformato in romanzo-conversazione, giacché le *idee* del “romanzo di idee” si risolvono totalmente in battute virgolettate, tra una folla di personaggi “intellettuali” in corsa frenetica attraverso le capitali del Rinascimento e del Boom e dei Festival.<sup>43</sup>

The classical *Bildungsroman*, and especially Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (1795), thus appears to be one of Arbasino’s main models, but I think there is a major difference which should be underlined: whereas in Goethe’s book Wilhelm’s apprenticeship proceeds through action and experience, in Arbasino’s case the central formative practice resides in the use of words; it is by means of endless conversations that his brilliant socialites change and come to know themselves.<sup>44</sup> Despite this sparkling social setting, *Fratelli d’Italia* remains a profoundly dark and disturbing book, ultimately animated by a deep *horror vacui*. This impression is a constant feature of Arbasino’s production; one feels the presence of some emptiness which should be filled and this provokes two different orders of consequences. At the level of the characters, we have a strong feeling of restlessness and anxiety, which can be seen in the way they react to different kinds of environment: a dull, provincial town or a lively seaside resort have on them the same unsatisfactory effect. At the structural level, the main result of this situation is a clear formal fragmentation. The loss of the sense of totality is—as we have seen—one of the main features of postmodernity and an element which causes anxiety and questions the very existence of a possible unifying system. In Arbasino’s time the place *où tout se tient* is no longer a viable option and *Fratelli*

<sup>43</sup> Alberto Arbasino, *Certi romanzi*, Turin, Einaudi, 1977, pp. 201-7.

<sup>44</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London, Verso, 1987.



*d'Italia* thus embodies a contradiction: the writer attempts with his book to create an example of contemporary encyclopaedism but in fact a subterranean form of uneasiness urges him towards the disintegration of structure and form. The ultimate consequence of this fragmentation is the inevitable anonymity of his characters: they all seem to be more or less the same, even the narrative persona is neuter and only slightly defined. The fact that they all speak, think and even act in the same way is a symptom of their one-dimensional nature, completely focused on the here and now of their lives.

This same sensation of a life lived on the edge of time is also characteristic of Tondelli's first two books—those of the so-called 'letteratura emotiva'—which are greatly indebted to Arbasino's works and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Tondelli considered Arbasino one of his main models and always declared his admiration openly. In 1980 he wrote:

Ho sempre tenuto a sottolineare [...] alcuni testi di cui non ho mai nascosto il mio profondo innamoramento [...] quando mi hanno chiesto di citare una [...] "linea" o "tendenza" a cui mi sono rifatto ho sempre detto che tutto è partito dai racconti delle *Piccole vacanze* studiati attraverso la loro riflessione interna e cioè *L'Anonimo lombardo*. Ho sempre creduto che bisognasse partire da lì, che [...] la migliore palestra fosse [...] l'esercizio di quelle [...] poetiche [...] del "sale sulla ferita", dell'andare dentro alle storie e alla realtà senza reticenze piccolo-borghesi; l'ossessione per un linguaggio reale e una comunicazione affettiva [...] l'amore per le trame e l'intreccio [...] il rispetto per l'autonomia dei personaggi fatti di sangue e vibrazioni e intensità intime. (I, 1119-20).

In a 1985 interview he confirmed his debt, saying:

sono stato influenzato [...] da alcuni testi per me fondamentali. Per esempio *L'Anonimo Lombardo*, che nella prima edizione conteneva anche il racconto *Le piccole vacanze*, è senza dubbio il più bel libro che Arbasino

abbia scritto, pieno di indicazioni di poetica e quasi di suggerimenti su un tipo di scrittura, su un tipo di letteratura. Quello fu un libro molto importante perché non solo mi dava queste indicazioni critiche sull'adozione del linguaggio parlato o sulla costruzione del personaggio, ma proprio perché era già uno stile che io sentivo molto nelle mie corde, lo stile cioè di un racconto dolce-amaro. Arbasino era ancora dolce-amaro, non era solamente ironico, o buffone, o cialtrone. Credeva proprio in una stagione della giovinezza. (II, 955-6).

However, despite some similarities, their starting points and achievements are dissimilar because influenced by different cultural backgrounds, interests and aims. On the one hand, Arbasino is the typical high society socialite; his wanderings between London and Paris, his presence at every theatre premiere and social event are part of the everyday life of the international jet-set. He does not perceive his travels as a privilege, but rather as something expected, naturally connected to his social status. The high society described by Arbasino is, because of its very nature, beyond boundaries. Borders are just a vague and blurred idea, something related to a petty, and typically bourgeois, mentality. This high-brow attitude obviously influences the way he travels and filters the details he consciously decides to underline. As Sergio Pautasso has put it:

La maniera di viaggiare di Arbasino è tutta all'opposto della canonica geografia sentimental-intellettuale del viaggiatore letterario. Non che egli trascuri paesaggi e ambienti, tutt'altro; ma i monumenti appartengono alla storia e non all'Immaginario come invece possono appartenervi un momento di vita colto in una strada, o un fatto improvviso che colpisce, recuperati nella loro immediatezza e nel loro significato. Perciò nella pagina del viaggiatore Arbasino si sentirà circolare piuttosto il formicolio della vita che incontrare impressionistiche descrizioni di paesaggi.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Sergio Pautasso, *Gli anni ottanta e la letteratura*, Milan, Rizzoli, 1991, p. 83.

By contrast in Tondelli the idea of travel is deeply connected to that of the existential journey. This attitude can be regarded as a reaction to the failure of the student movement. Its defeat at the end of the 1970s—along with the drift towards terrorism and the subsequent imprisonment and trials of some of its members—left many of that generation without clear reference points. The collapse of its ‘grand narrative’—of the possibility of changing the world—results in the return to a more intimate dimension. The party politics of the 1960s and 70s—with its well-organized groups and *collettivi*—finds itself in opposition to the ‘lifestyle politics’ that followed it, disconnected from traditional forms and more focused on a personal and individual dimension. The youth culture emerging from the ashes of the student movement is what Angelo Mainardi calls a ‘cultura [...] dello “sfascio”. [...] droga, sesso facile, sperpero di se stessa di una generazione, ma soprattutto abbandono alle occasioni quotidiane, il vivere con un’assenza totale di riferimenti ideologici o comunque normativi’ (II, 948-9). This culture will be central in *Altri libertini* and *Pao Pao*.

#### ‘Un weekend postmoderno’

Before moving on to a discussion of those two books, I would like to add something about the collection of articles published by Tondelli in 1990, *Un weekend postmoderno*, which will be an important source of material for analysing his fiction. Whilst there is no chapter in the thesis specifically devoted to the analysis of this text, references to it are scattered in all the other chapters. It can be regarded as a subtext and commentary on the writer’s fiction texts, and it is

characterized by a complex and stratified structure open to different readings and interpretations.

Between 1982 and 1983 Tondelli started working on a novel entitled *Un weekend postmoderno* that was to have focused on the 1980s. The project was put aside but he subsequently used the same title for an anthology of articles and essays written during that decade, with a significant additional subtitle: *Cronache dagli anni ottanta*. The choice of the preposition 'dagli', instead of the more immediate and obvious 'degli', underlined the character of the book as a reportage through time and space. The opportunity finally to come to terms with the 1980s appears to be one of Tondelli's main concerns and it propels the author towards the re-elaboration of his old writings. On the one hand, his works respond to a need to find a governing principle in his output:

Risponde al bisogno, dopo dieci anni di lavoro, di fare un bilancio, per vedere quello che si è fatto e come lo si è fatto, quello che si è riusciti a capire della realtà o dei fenomeni culturali che si sono avvicendati. Siccome sono uscito col primo libro nei primi mesi del 1980 quasi naturalmente diventava una cronaca degli anni ottanta. Questo è il motivo esterno, essenziale: la motivazione. (II, 976).

On the other hand, his drive seems to be of a psychological nature and to be connected to the attempt to remove the negative aura that usually surrounds that decade:

Gli anni ottanta possono essere stati una tragedia dal punto di vista del rampantismo, della superficialità, del becero presenzialismo, di una certa stupidità [...] emersi, cancellando quelle possibilità che erano state aperte già negli anni settanta [...] Ma [...] sono stati anni in cui credo sia scaturito molto divertimento, soprattutto per una generazione che non aveva mai visto lo smoking—c'è voluta la new wave—né una cravatta, ma

solo troppa droga, troppi sballi, troppe difficoltà. Il discorso incentrato sull'immagine, sulla superficie, sul postmoderno ha avuto anche i suoi lati euforici, anche se poi [...] si è trasformato in un travestimento che ha cercato di celare e di nascondere un grande vuoto. Con quella pesante eredità degli anni settanta da portarsi dietro: chi con l'alcol, chi con l'eroina, chi con le paranoie politiche. (II, 988).

From a strictly technical point of view, Tondelli's work on *Un weekend postmoderno* is characterized by an intense rewriting, which he himself acknowledged in the 'Avvertenza' to the first edition:

Delle stesure originarie la riscrittura attuale ha cercato di conservare i tic stilistici, gli entusiasmi, il ritmo, anche l'ingenuità o la passione descrittiva, ora correggendo, ora tagliando, in alcune occasioni applicandosi a un vero e proprio restauro. E nei casi in cui tutto ciò si è dimostrato impossibile, anche per evitare ripetizioni, si è gettato tutto e ci si è rimessi, pazientemente, alla scrivania. Per questo molte sezioni [...] sono da considerare totalmente inedite. (II, 1030).

The result of this work is a book characterized by an accentuated, but also deliberate, fragmentation which proceeds through 'reportage, illuminazioni interiori, riflessioni, descrizioni partecipi e dirette nella parte degli anni ottanta più creativa e sperimentale' (II, 993-4). This fragmented dimension is partly a consequence of the nature of those years: whilst in the previous decade individuality was submerged and mingled into other people's experiences through the activities of collectives and self-awareness sessions, during the 1980s it recovers its value. Being a writer, an actor or a musician now acquires a different and more determinate meaning whose first consequence is the birth of many different artistic groups increasingly differentiated both in their aspirations and in their attitude. This situation contrasts with the idea of the 80s as a decade doomed by TV levelling and makes it impossible to represent these years in terms of a

coherent and unifying tendency. The most appropriate image of the 80s is, in fact, that of a stratified decade, made up of contrasting waves and trends that appear to be particularly strong at the provincial level. As Fulvio Panzeri writes:

La presunta omologazione, attraverso la subcultura di massa del mezzo televisivo, ha prodotto un vero e proprio oscuramento delle realtà di aggregazione che si andavano però imponendo nel microcosmo incandescente della provincia. La reale dimensione del decennio si caratterizza per la formazione di gruppi d'appartenenza, le cui leggi appaiono fortemente differenziate [...] In tal senso non vi è più, come nei decenni precedenti, un'uniformazione delle esperienze [...] Negli anni ottanta, il riconoscimento, per ciascun gruppo, è diventato elitario. Ogni "tribù" si definisce entro una specifica rete di rapporti e suggestioni. La caratterizzazione delle diversità è proprio all'origine della realtà frammentata, entro la quale è impossibile arrivare alla definizione di una qualsivoglia moda predominante. Si producono così stratificazioni culturali [...] che si disperdono nel giro di una stagione. Ogni assunzione di comportamento rimane all'insegna dell'illusorio, del passeggero, di un segmento di storia, presto sostituito da un altro completamente divergente. (II, XI-XII).

The range of articles collected in the volume is extremely varied; according to Arbasino's principle of an all-embracing *Kulturkritik* everything—art, music, books, cinema, comics—is at least cited if not thoroughly analysed and pondered. This apparent confusion is not due to a lack of clarity in the author's intent, but rather corresponds to that diversification already mentioned as a main feature of the decade. This variety inevitably influences the book's structure, which could be treated as an 'opera aperta', a reference book with information, stories and comments on and from the 80s. In addition the presence of an extremely detailed table of contents and an analytical index, respectively at the beginning and end of the volume, testifies to the writer's will to leave the reader

free to move back and forth through his book, without a precise order or a predetermined path.

From this perspective, *Un weekend postmoderno* can be considered the anti-traditional book par excellence, a book whose cultural matrix may be traced in the post-1968 cultural revolution connected to the experiences of the Neoavanguardia and especially of the DAMS (Discipline delle Arti, della Musica e dello Spettacolo), founded in Bologna in 1970. The intellectual figure who emerges from this book is associated with that interdisciplinary and multimedia perspective developed from the lectures of Gianni Celati, Umberto Eco and Giuliano Scabia during the DAMS years. This perspective nonetheless needs to be complemented by all those non-institutional experiences, such as collectives, free radios and spontaneous art forms, which nourished the imagery of those formative years. In 1985 Tondelli remembers:

Vorrei commemorare qui gli anni settanta, anni molto cari e molto amati per quello che hanno [...] rappresentato per un ragazzo che li ha attraversati dai quindici ai venticinque anni d'età. Il ragazzo [...] avrebbe contestato il nozionismo degli insegnanti in modo individuale [...]. Avrebbe detestato la politica, pur conservando aspirazioni terzomondiste e comuniste [...] avrebbe letto [...] "Lotta Continua" [...] "Re Nudo" [...] "Lambda". Avrebbe collezionato testi, poesie, romanzetti, diari e confessioni pubblicati da case editrici di cui ora non può ricordare il nome, ma che in quegli anni erano conosciutissime, e testimoniavano di una collettiva voglia di prendere la parola [...] Avrebbe praticato l'arte macrobiotica; la sua stanza avrebbe sempre profumato di incensi indiani e cinesi ed echeggiato [...] musica [...] Avrebbe lavorato [...] in una cooperativa teatrale [...] una radio libera [...] un cineclub. Avrebbe amato l'impegno del cinema americano degli inizi del decennio [...] Essere giovani, in quel decennio, significò una cosa importantissima: essere presi in considerazione, avere la consapevolezza che il destino della società si giocava (ed era giocato) sulle proprie spalle. I ragazzi erano la "piazza". Fu da questo giovanilismo imperante che nacquero, da un punto di vista esistenziale, le degenerazioni di quegli anni; proprio dal fatto di voler vivere la propria vita (e di essere autorizzati a farlo dalla violenza di stato)

come un “assoluto avventuroso” [...] Certo non si potrà rimanere impassibili di fronte alle speculazioni che vengono avanzate su un decennio in cui sembra che tutti fossero violenti, sprangatori, estremisti. Per molti, quegli anni sono stati anche divertenti, creativi, fertilissimi, pieni di fantasia [...] Forse i miei anni migliori sono finiti. Ma non li rivorrei indietro [...] Forse, di quegli anni, quel ragazzo e io rivorremmo un po’ di progettualità e di tensione ideale. (II, 131-4).

The pages of ‘Quel ragazzo’ echo the description of Annacarla’s room in *Altri libertini*, a passage which I shall discuss in Chapter 2. This similarity is a proof of the nature of *Un weekend postmoderno* as the non-fictional subtext of and commentary on Tondelli’s narrative production. It is Fulvio Panzeri who highlights this feature of the book:

*Un weekend postmoderno* copre l’arco temporale di dieci anni e nasce, come stesura originaria, parallelamente ai racconti e ai romanzi. Da questo punto di vista, il materiale che compone il libro può essere letto come una postilla o un sottotesto, redatto in forma di lunghe note che definiscono ulteriormente [...] i contenuti dell’opera narrativa. (II, VII).

The postmodern nature of the book is connected to its planned heterogeneity. *Un weekend postmoderno* covers, with a certain degree of daring, high and low culture and does not seem to be bothered by schematic hierarchies: under its horizon, an article on James Baldwin and one on the nightlife on the Adriatic coast deserve the same degree of attention and importance. This attitude is the consequence of the cultural melting pot so typical of postmodernity, when the artist finds himself in a world where everything has already been said or seen. This *déjà vu* dimension of being leaves him with just one option: that of recycling already known material through a new web of references. Such a process of cognition-through-recognition is a fundamental element of postmodernism and



implies the use of re-writing as a primary method of production. *Un weekend postmoderno* fits in the category of rewriting as a self-reflexive literary practice. The continuous consideration and reworking of his previous non-fictional works and the way they are connected to his fictional production appear to be two of Tondelli's most important concerns:

Fare letteratura diventa un atto progettuale, un continuo ripensamento di sé in termini letterari [...] L'organicità dell'opera tondelliana, il rigore che la governa, nel momento in cui la si guarda nella sua completezza, nasce proprio da questo atteggiamento. Si colgono numerose relazioni tra l'opera narrativa e l'intervento saggistico, quasi un flusso che vuole designare una continuità e una progressione. (Panzeri, II, XVIII).

Another prominent element of the book is its dimension of literary and spiritual legacy; *Un weekend postmoderno* is a form of biography reconstructed through articles and memorials, in which the feeling of the passing of time is a constant undertone, rather than through the reworking of events. As Peter Bichsel writes in a book often mentioned by Tondelli:<sup>46</sup>

Geschichtenerzählen befaßt sich mit einer Selbstverständlichkeit: daß es Zeit gibt und daß wir unser Leben als Zeit erleben. Geschichtenerzählen ist Umgehen mit der Zeit, und daß wir unser Leben als Zeit erleben, hat damit zu tun, daß unser Leben endlich ist und auch damit, daß das Leben unserer Freunde endlich ist.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The longest and most significant mention of Bichsel's book is in the 'Note ai testi' of *L'abbandono. Racconti dagli anni Ottanta*, Milan, Bompiani, 1993, p. 304.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Bichsel, *Der Leser, das Erzählen*, Darmstadt und Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1982, p. 10. 'Il raccontare storie si occupa di una cosa evidente: che esiste il tempo e che la nostra vita è vissuta in quanto tempo. Raccontare storie significa occuparsi del tempo, ed esperire la nostra vita come tempo ha a che vedere col fatto che la nostra vita ha un termine, e che la vita dei nostri amici ne ha pure uno'. Peter Bichsel, *Il lettore, il narrare*, trans. by Giorgio Messori, Milan, Marcos y Marcos, 1989, p. 17.

What clearly emerges both from the intent and the structure of the book is, once more, the importance attributed by the author to the idea of the journey (either physical or imaginary) as a basic formative experience. According to Giulio Iacoli, the book is structured around a geographical metaphor:

Il *Weekend* appare come l'ambiziosa mappatura di uno spazio vissuto, risultante dell'intersezione di vita giovanile e vita letteraria, sulla quale si stende il velo della soggettività di Tondelli. La metafora cognitiva schiude così uno spazio privato ed emotivo, che comunichi il cuore del racconto sul quale converge la geografia letteraria: "un messaggio territoriale, che l'autore veicola attraverso la capacità del suo linguaggio di fissare nei luoghi e nei paesaggi, dei significati pensati".<sup>48</sup>

In a borderless and postmodern world, the practice of writing remains the only possible unifying factor. What we have here is the image of the writer as a connector. His influence on a reality and a society that is otherwise nuclearized and fragmented serves as a stabilizing element, even though in the acceptance of the impossibility of reconstructing a long lost order. Hence the deliberate heterogeneity of the book and the possibility of reading it as an 'opera aperta'. In the opening section of the book, *Scenari italiani*, which is completely devoted to the analysis of Italian provincial realities, Iacoli retraces the

coesistenza nel libro, summa e laboratorio della restante produzione, di più mappe: al tentativo di decrittare i segni incerti della comunicazione e delle relazioni internazionali (in parallelo a *Rimini e Dinner Party*) si aggiunge la radiografia dei moti più intimi, più coinvolgenti, della propria giovinezza [...] la cartografia regionale della propria terra come epicentro dell'intensità che percorre e scuote il libro. Ed è esattamente dalla provincia che si parte per il viaggio, per incontrare l'Altro e definirlo in relazione alla propria cultura e alla propria origine—e successiva formazione.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Iacoli, p. 138.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 139.

The original structure of the book, whose first edition was published by Bompiani in 1990, consisted of twelve different sections which were then divided into numerous sub-chapters.<sup>50</sup> The edition collected in the second volume of the *Opere*, which is the one I have used here, has been slightly modified by the editor and omits the section relating to the project 'Under 25' (section number 8 in the original edition).<sup>51</sup> The articles collected in the volume were published by Tondelli in different newspapers and magazines, some of which are part of what could be called 'mainstream culture', for instance *La Repubblica*, *L'Espresso*, *Il Resto del Carlino*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, while others are more connected to underground movements, such as *Babilonia*, *Flash Art*, *Alter Alter* and *Linus*. There are also previously unpublished articles or texts written for 'numeri 0'—prototype issues of new magazines—or for fanzines too specialized to reach an audience through traditional channels.

The most evident characteristic of the book is, as already mentioned, its layered structure which encompasses all of Tondelli's most recurrent themes. The first reading level, the most evident and external, is that of the overview of the 1980s, with the author producing a sort of travel guide for the reader that includes, variously, an article on the 41<sup>st</sup> Venice Biennale, a review of an album by The Smiths, a piece on Florence (but also on Modena, Bologna and Correggio) and a description of London nightlife. The unifying element in this diversified mixture of interests is the same guileless approach, playing on the theme of discovery and

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<sup>50</sup> They are: 1. *Scenari italiani*; 2. *Rimini come Hollywood*; 3. *Scuola*; 4. *Affari militari*; 5. *Un weekend postmoderno*; 6. *Fauna d'arte*; 7. *Frequenze rock*; 8. *Under 25*; 9. *Viaggi*; 10. *Geografia letteraria*; 11. *America*; 12. *Giro in provincia*.

<sup>51</sup> For an accurate description of the editorial choices behind the second volume of *Opere*, see Fulvio Panzeri, 'Nota all'edizione', *Opere II*, pp. XXV-XXVIII.

novelty. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to notice in this first reading a note of regret and bitterness sparked by the sad decline of the utopian expectations of the 1970s, already expressed in the pages of 'Quel ragazzo'. Remembering Andrea Pazienza, one of the tragic symbols of this decline and fall, Tondelli writes:

Andrea Pazienza è riuscito a rappresentare, in vita e [...] in morte, il destino, le astrazioni, la follia, la genialità, la miseria, la disperazione di una generazione che solo sbrigativamente [...] chiameremo quella "del '77 bolognese" [...] con la vitalità, il gusto della beffa e della provocazione, l'ingenuità, le ragazzate di quel movimento, Andrea ha pure assorbito le mitologie negative degli anni settanta [...] E allora: guadagnare tanto per buttare via tutto, non pensare mai al futuro, non fare mai progetti, vivere alla giornata, avere orrore di costruirsi una carriera (e in questo, Andrea, con tutto quel talentaccio sparso da ogni parte, è stato un vero, grande antimaestro), provare ribrezzo dei ruoli professionali, identificarsi completamente con la *bohème* del proprio lavoro artistico, unire le ragioni della vita a quelle dell'arte. In sostanza giocare, con il proprio talento, alla roulette russa. Strapazzarlo, gettarlo, immiserirlo, sprecarlo, dannarlo, sapendo di poterlo ritrovare intatto il giorno dopo, ancora più brillante e sgargiante. E' questo che la morte di Andrea mi mette davanti, spietatamente: il lato negativo di una cultura e di una generazione che non ha mai, realmente, creduto a niente, se non nella propria dannazione [...] Molti altri, vittime e interpreti di quegli anni, sono scomparsi. C'era qualcosa che non andava allora, ed era il mito dell'autodistruzione. Qualcuno ne è saltato fuori, qualcun altro no e ha pagato carissimo. (II, 230-2).

The discussion of the fall of the 1970s ideals and the subsequent precariousness of the 1980s is central to the development of the book. The connections between the sections of *Un weekend postmoderno* and Tondelli's fiction are sometimes extremely easy to acknowledge;<sup>52</sup> at other times they appear to be more subtle and more focused on a general attitude or influence rather than on specific intertextual links.

In general, the feeling channelled by the book is that the writer, after ten

<sup>52</sup> Examples are *Scenari italiani*, *Affari militari*, *Rimini come Hollywood*, *Viaggi and Giro in provincia*, whose relation to Tondelli's narrative is indisputable and well documented.

years of a very detailed musing on different environments (the province, military life, etc.) has decided to adopt a sort of wide-angle lens to obtain an exhaustive image of this same landscape. This wider perspective incorporates the author's references to his books (both in the form of commentary and preparatory draft); it also involves some implicit notions of the poetic, transmitted through those articles of literary criticism that usually disguise themselves as a form of self-reflexive critical analysis. The underlying meaning of these articles is, once more, that of the journey as an internal recognition: the books become *in-scapes*, and mapping one's own literary references acquires the added value of a self-analytical session. The existential journey of the writer thus works through the quest for his literary roots; this explains the presence in *Un weekend postmoderno* of the pages on Vienna following the footsteps of W. H. Auden or the hunt for pre-war Berlin described by Christopher Isherwood in *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939). The images and illusions of past generations are therefore regarded as a starting point for the creation of a new system of values, since 'è proprio attraverso il viaggio—mentale o reale che sia, interiore o avventuroso—che ogni generazione costruisce la propria memoria e, a ben guardare, anche la propria leggenda' (II, 464). In the pages on Vienna, Tondelli explains the idea of the journey behind his literary and emotional wanderings:

l'idea del viaggio non era, nelle intenzioni, né sepolcrale, né mesta. Era, questo sì, letteraria: un viaggio sentimentale alla ricerca di luoghi e presenze letterarie, di paesaggi, di abitazioni, di ultime dimore; un viaggio immaginato sui libri e che ai libri, ai romanzi, alla poesia necessariamente riportava. Non tanto, allora, l'idea del viaggiare per poi inviare cartoline, quanto piuttosto il percorso inverso: avendo ricevuto, al pari di tanti

milioni di lettori, splendide cartoline da laggiù [...] provare a dirigere l'automobile alle radici dell'ispirazione, fra quelle mura e quei monti, ben sapendo, d'altra parte, come perentoriamente afferma Peter Handke, che "un libro è un libro, un luogo è un luogo" ma almeno poter partecipare della scenografia, confrontarsi, con un taccuino in mano, con lo stesso tramonto, gli stessi colori, i profumi delle abetaie e dei boschi, l'odore di letame della campagna e cercare di capire fin dove lo sguardo dei poeti è potuto arrivare: quali analogie ha prodotto quel misero cespuglio; che cosa ha rilanciato nell'immaginario quel povero ponte, oppure quel pozzo o quel viottolo; che cosa è stato tralasciato; che cosa considerato; che cosa e come è stato rimato. Viaggio come esercizio letterario...Forse, anche, il senso di un vero e proprio pellegrinaggio: ritualità, cioè, di un cammino, alla ricerca di sensibilità che si reputano affini e maestre; compagni di viaggio a cui si è chiesto per anni, attraverso la voce del testo, protezione e illuminazione. (II, 419).

This form of pilgrimage is best realized in a private dimension. The theme of the solitary traveller that will be so central in *Camere separate* finds its most accomplished articulation in a 1987 text:

Quando si viaggia soli ci si rende ridicoli e disarmati. La solitudine si fa sentire non tanto nel bisogno di qualcuno, ma nelle piccole manovre quotidiane che diventano difficoltose, quasi impossibili [...] Solamente in questo, viaggiando, mi sento solo. Nient'altro [...] Voglio che la mia solitudine sia rispettata. Se sono solo, non per questo sono un uomo a metà. Non per questo ho bisogno di petulanti eserciti della salvezza che vengano a disturbarmi [...] sono debole come tutti, e fragile ed emotivo. Ma so stare solo [...] Quando ero più giovane, non mi piaceva viaggiare [...] mi sono chiesto perché da qualche anno anch'io ami [...] viaggiare. Allora mi sono dato una risposta. Quando ero ragazzo, ero un ignorantone, leggevo poco, scrivevo male [...] Oggi, invece [...] posso vedere e sentire [...] in un modo diverso. Leggere libri, guardare opere d'arte, ascoltare musica, andare al cinema, sono tutte attività che nutrono il nostro sentire [...] In questi anni votati così spudoratamente alla fatuità e al perbenismo, anche starsene un po' zitti e cercare di crescere nell'interiorità può essere un gran bene. Questo ho pensato [...] durante il mio viaggio solitario. E ve lo dico con un po' di rabbia, perché mi sembra di trarre una morale da un'esperienza che preferisco lasciare così, senza un senso definitivo. Perché forse la gioia è nel non avere bisogno di giustificazioni e di morali: accettare di sperperare tempo e denaro e affetti perché è così e non se ne può fare a meno. Il dolore è sterile. Ma è l'unica cosa che ho, questo dolore, per cercare di capire. (II, 349-53).

## CHAPTER 2

### **The Emotional Writing of *Altri libertini and Pao Pao***

Les marges d'un livre ne sont jamais nettes ni rigoureusement tranchées: par-delà le titre, les premières lignes et le point final, par-delà sa configuration interne [...] il est pris dans un système de renvois [...] Le livre a beau se donner comme un objet qu'on a sous la main [...] son unité est variable et relative.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Schizophrenic Geographies: the Postmodern Era*

The postmodern ideas connected to the 'disappearance' of borders and the role of boundaries in creating the 'Us' and the 'Other' are very important in the works of Tondelli, even if only as a subtext. The writer is still under the influence of that process of *detrterritorialization* introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in which the core concern is the relation of power between modern society and desire.<sup>2</sup> Modernity, from their point of view, is nothing more than a 'soft' form of Fascism which exercises dominance by inserting repression into everyday life, even in its most insignificant details. They call this *territorialization*, the process through which both society and theory attempt—like Freudianism, which reduces all of life to the structure of the nuclear family, and Marxism, which limits human diversity through the myth of the unity of the working class—to tame human desire. This attempt, they claim, is destined to be thwarted since the idea of stable identities and unified, coherent, psyches simply does not apply to human beings.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Œdipe*, Paris, Les Éditions du Minuit, 1972.

Instead, they celebrate chaos and multiplicity in life as the only possible forms of salvation for our desires. In Deleuze and Guattari's book, the self is seen as a 'flux of desires and intensities'<sup>3</sup> that shoot out in many directions and absorb many influences, to the point that they deny the possibility of making generalizations about things such as the psyche or the self, which can only be detected through differences rather than established categories.

The *detrterritorialization* of subjectivity, or capacity of freeing the self from the boundaries of society, can be considered a form of schizophrenia. The postmodern artist is a sort of 'autistic rag'<sup>4</sup>, a psychotic subject who gives way to his desire to flow into multiple, random connections: the schizophrenic deliberately scrambles all the codes by quickly shifting from one to another. This continuous shifting reflects itself not only in human beings, but also in state boundaries which are no longer, in the postmodern era, just static naturalized categories located between states; they are also social, political and discursive constructs, with a meaning which is often historically contingent and is part of the process of production and institutionalization of territories and territoriality. Most of the time, boundaries are not only arbitrary lines between geographical entities: they also have a deep symbolic, historical and religious meaning, a meaning often contested, but always of the greatest importance for the surrounding social communities both in the sense of acceptance and denial of these sometimes self-imposed limits. As David Sibley writes:

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<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Athlone Press, London, 1984, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 19.



A fear of mixing unlike things often signifies a reluctance to give ground and relinquish power. In all kinds of political, social and socio-spatial relationships, boundaries then assume considerable significance because they are simultaneously zones of uncertainty and security.<sup>5</sup>

The modern patterns of movement and flow of people, culture, goods and information show that nowadays the attempt to define a community or a nation's 'natural' limits is a task involving not so much physical boundaries as communication networks and symbolic borders such as language and culture. Implicit in postmodernism is therefore the notion that the transformation of socio-spatial organizations into a postmodern hyperspace is accompanied by the loss of boundaries and that globalization processes threaten the peculiarity of places, borders and territoriality. Nonetheless, 'identity' is an inescapable dimension of being and now it can only be constituted in relation to difference rather than similarity. The postmodern Ulysses feels that time is no longer a valid hypothesis, a solid starting point on which to build his or her identity, and s/he consequently decides to rely on ideas of space to construct the self only to find out that the new boundaries, mainly constituted by information networks, which are invisible and hence impossible to map, leave him/her puzzled and lost.

In the postmodern era the text is thus inevitably invested with a fatal displacement. Giulio Iacoli in his *Atlante delle derive* emphasizes that the text (which reflects on the page the uncertainty of this displaced situation) is at the centre of a process of 'déplaçabilité' that aims to let the text go gently adrift, away from the unity and centrality of monologic thought. We are now at the end of the era of traditional monolithic narration—at the collapse of *grand narratives*—and

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<sup>5</sup> David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 183.

the text, in order to survive, must turn into something radically different: an intricate web of micro-narrations. All forms of artistic expression—novel, cinema, music, multimedia art, photography—that offer the chance to read even a single and small fragment of the larger map are now regarded as meaningful and productive. If, therefore, on the one hand we are witnessing the crisis of the traditional idea of literature, on the other we are seeing the emergence of a new kind of literary expression in which place is invested with the magnetic and constructive power to adjust and guide the interpretative process.<sup>6</sup>

In Tondelli's work this sense of displacement takes the form of a painful and constant dialectic between the options of a radical estrangement and a strong nostalgic search for a new form of integration and rest in the maternal womb of the province and birthplace. This dialectic is connected to what Tondelli calls *letteratura emozionale*, a form of writing that can be regarded as a tool to destabilize the idea of territory. In Tondelli's work, emotion and desire do not recognize the authority of a principle such as the self-justification of one's identity. The writer is constantly attracted towards other bodies, surroundings, and languages in a 'schizophrenic', 'Deleuzeian' way. During this process borders and self-defences are weakened and become more and more indeterminate. Being part of a territory is perceived as a conservative attempt to preserve one's identity, a restoration of the self not required or wanted by the subject.

The most accomplished examples of Tondelli's idea of emotional literature are his first two books, *Altri libertini* (1980) and *Pao Pao* (1982), where geography and emotionality are strongly interrelated and influence—though in

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<sup>6</sup> Giulio Iacoli, *Atlante delle derive. Geografie da un'Emilia postmoderna: Gianni Celati e Pier Vittorio Tondelli*, Reggio Emilia Diabasis, 2002, p. 14.

different ways—the intertextual dimension of the novels.<sup>7</sup> Especially in *Altri libertini* Tondelli shows a strong ambivalence between his attachment to locality (Emilia and Correggio) and his desire to be elsewhere (London and Amsterdam). This ambiguity is connected to a basic displacement in that his Emilia is a place already saturated culturally with other places. These other places—and particularly the United States—enter and infuse it in the form of written texts, films, music, comics that are subsequently textualized by Tondelli in his books. This situation forces the author to deal with two kinds of movement: the virtual movement of foreign cultural products into Emilia and the physical movement of people—Tondelli and others—out of Emilia and/or Italy. *Pao Pao* instead is about—as we will see later in this chapter—a different kind of emotional literature. The microcosm constituted by the barracks—where the soldiers are forcibly placed—represents a displacement that is psychological rather than physical.

In these books cultural references and everyday life are blended by the author into a complex mixture: music is not only a background soundtrack, books are not simply a bedside companion, films are not merely shadows on a black screen. Every external input is worth a look and then absorbed and transformed by the author into a written text. The references scattered through their pages cannot be considered simply a pyrotechnical display of erudition, but rather a proof of the corporeality of the text, constantly nourished by the writer's enthusiasm. Tondelli is very conscious of this idea of literature as something emotional, something

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<sup>7</sup> For a thorough analysis of Tondelli's 'emotional space', see Roberto Carnero, *Lo spazio emozionale*, Novara, Interlinea, 1998.

physical and strong. In the essay *Colpo d'oppio*, written in the same period as his debut book, he writes:

La mia letteratura è emotiva, le mie storie sono emotive; l'unico spazio che ha il testo per durare è quello emozionale [...] Dopo due righe, il lettore deve essere schiavizzato, incapace di liberarsi dalla pagina; deve trovarsi coinvolto fino al parossismo [...] Questa è letteratura. *La letteratura emotiva è una letteratura di potenza.* [...] La letteratura emotiva è quella più intimamente connessa alla lingua...esprime le intensità del linguaggio; la letteratura emotiva è "scrittura emotiva" [...] La scrittura emotiva altro non è che il 'sound del linguaggio parlato', definizione [...] di un tale Anonimo Lombardo [Arbasino] che [...] un quarto di secolo fa scriveva: 'Il lavoro più giusto e più difficile che si possa fare oggi con la nostra lingua è proprio quello di inventare sulla pagina il sound del linguaggio parlato'. La scrittura emotiva è dunque sound, codice sonoro; è catena fonica [...] il testo diventa questione di ritmo [...] finché c'è swing dura, non finisce. Per questo il racconto è il miglior tempo della narrazione emotiva, la quale finisce quando è ora di finire: non una battuta in più, non una riga. [...] Il racconto, dunque, non il romanzo. Il romanzo è morto. [...] Non c'è più tempo per dedicare giorni e giorni alla letteratura. [...] questa è la scrittura emotiva [...] un ritmo, un crescendo, una discesa agli inferi [...] è azione [...] non conosce mezze misure. La scrittura emotiva è spigolosa, è forte, è densa [...] l'interesse è portato sui personaggi: i personaggi sono intensità emotive, sono cortocircuiti di sound [...] i personaggi sono derivate discorsive nella corrente fluxus del linguaggio [...] Il romanzo emotivo riporta il testo nel territorio della spettacolizzazione, della fabulazione e dell'avventura, dove tutto è raccontabile, cantabile e riassumibile come in un film. Qualsiasi testo emotivo si può raccontare e intrecciare. Il testo emotivo è così destinato a una circolarità di lettura, a una trasmissibilità orale. Il testo emotivo è l'unico testo che si può parlare. L'unico che si può cantare e ballare. L'unico che si può dolcemente cullare nella propria gola e fischiettare nel proprio cervello. Il testo emotivo fonde l'inconsolabile solitudine di essere al mondo. (II, 779-82).

Thus an emotional text should be frightening and threatening. An echo of Tondelli's emotional literature can be traced in the work of the cartoonist Andrea Pazienza. In the stories of his most popular character, Zanardi, he recreates an image of Bologna during the 1970s which is very similar to some of the places described by Tondelli in *Altri libertini*. In a short essay Pazienza writes:

Secondo me il fumetto, così come un libro o un film, deve muovere il *kiai*. Il *kiai*, secondo la disciplina del kendo, corrisponde al plesso solare. Se io devo battere qualcuno non lo batto con la testa, non gli do le botte con le zampe, glielo do con il plesso solare. Se io dico che tu ti devi spostare perché io ti schiavardo, ti appiccico contro il muro, lo dico con lo stomaco. E' allora che si fa paura veramente, e a me interessa far paura, tutto il resto non esiste. E da qui deriva il discorso sulla tecnica [...] Chi se ne frega che cosa è e che cosa non è, l'importante è, leggendo una storia, se ne rimani emozionato, condizionato o meno.<sup>8</sup>

The technical discourse is therefore placed in the background because it is considered as an end in itself. Between Tondelli's emotional literature and the classical, monolithic novel, we can identify the same difference as exists between an interpersonal and extroverted relation and a self-absorbed, introverted experience. A strong awareness of the surrounding place is fundamental for an understanding of Tondelli's first novels. Student life in Bologna is the meaningful centre of his world and deeply influences the form and content of what he writes, sometimes even to the point of obliterating his own identity. A similar attitude towards the idea of personal identity can be traced in Enrico Palandri's *Boccalone*: 'la differenza tra me e gli altri, l'identità, non so bene cosa sia e non me ne frega più un granché! [...] tutti gli altri appaiono così impalpabili.'<sup>9</sup>

The comparison between Tondelli and Palandri and the importance of the geographical background in their debut novels are recurrent motifs in the reviews of the period. In *Il Secolo XIX* (5 March 1980) Vittorio Borelli writes:

Come Palandri, anche Tondelli scrive avendo come sfondo l'Emilia Romagna. Ciò non è privo di significato se si pensa che questa regione

<sup>8</sup> Andrea Pazienza, *Paz. Scritti, disegni, fumetti*, ed. by Vincenzo Mollica, Turin, Einaudi, 1997, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> Enrico Palandri, *Boccalone. Storia vera piena di bugie*, Milan, L'Erba Voglio, 1979, p. 180.

rappresenta [...] l'emblema del conflitto [...] tra garantiti e non garantiti. Da un lato [...] una popolazione culturalmente omogenea, toccata meno di altre dagli effetti della crisi italiana [...] dall'altro una generazione in cui predomina la figura dello studente proletarizzato, ghettizzato nella città universitaria di Bologna piuttosto che nei nuovi ghetti di Reggio e Modena, tanto insicura del proprio futuro, quanto fatalisticamente aggressiva rispetto al proprio presente. (I, 1121-2).

The feeling of displacement felt by Italian youth during the 1970s is just one fragment of a wider phenomenon involving many other young people in Europe at the same time. The social unease of those years in Europe also had a lot in common with that experienced by American youth between the end of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s and that which culminated in the widespread protest against the Vietnam War. Many aspects of the social criticism described by Tondelli and Palandri in their novels (a newly acquired sexual freedom, the use of drugs, the centrality attributed to music and a general disregard for the old social rules) were connected to the protest in the United States and soon spread within a generation that experienced the social changes triggered by the economic boom in a dramatic way. The strong bond between this youth and America was clearly underlined by critics when the books first appeared. Giampaolo Martelli wrote of *Altri libertini* (*Il Giornale*, 10 February 1980):

una cosa è chiara: e cioè che 'i libertini' di Tondelli, ex movimentisti e freakettoni, sballati ed hippies in ritardo, sono emiliani di nascita ma la loro *kultur* è americana e per vivere negli *States* darebbero chissà che cosa. Forse il vero 'scandalo' del libro è questo: constatare che dopo il '68 e il '77 a parlare a questi ragazzi 'in paranoia' che non credono più nella Rivoluzione, ripiegati in se stessi e delusi di tutto, è rimasta soltanto l'America: un'America contraddittoria e permissiva, caotica e amara, violenta e sotterranea ma che ai loro occhi appare viva. Già la riscoperta del rock ha questo significato. (I, 1121).

*Paranoid Countryside: 'Altri libertini'*

Tondelli published his first book, *Altri libertini*, a collection of six ostensibly separate but also interlinked short stories, at the beginning of 1980. His debut is still strongly connected to his birthplace and province, but it seems immediately clear, from the title alone, that his intention is to highlight a new Emilia, 'another' province, completely different from that image of a rich and comfortable land which was already so well-known as to have become almost stereotypical. The county described by Tondelli seems to anticipate the 'Emilia paranoica' sung by CCCP (1986), a wasteland of eternal nights spent wandering aimlessly from town to town:

Emilia Paranoica  
 Accordi secchi e tesi  
 Segnalano il tuo ingresso  
 Nella mia memoria  
 Emilia Paranoica  
 Brucia Tiro, Sidone il roipnol fa un casino  
 Se mescolato all'alcool  
 Posso essere uno stupido felice  
 Un prepolitico un tossicomane  
 Quello che se ne va nelle storie d'amore  
 Camminare leggero soddisfatto di me  
 Da Reggio a Parma da Parma a Reggio  
 A Modena a Carpi, a Carpi al Tuwat  
 Emilia di notti dissolversi stupide  
 Sparire una ad una impotenti  
 Emilia di notti tranquille  
 In cui seduzione è dormire  
 Emilia di notti ricordo  
 Senza che torni la felicità  
 Emilia di notti d'attesa di non so più  
 Qual amor mio che non muore.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> CCCP, 'Emilia Paranoica', 1964-1985 *Affinità-divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi—Del conseguimento della maggiore età*, Attack Punk, 1986.

The division into short stories functions by giving us a new topography of the region of Emilia which becomes progressively a *mindscape* rather than a landscape, a mindscape that gives Tondelli the chance to free himself, at least on the page, from the surrounding provinciality. This new identity allows him to transform geographical paths into emotional ones: the misadventures of the Splash girls between Modena and Reggio in *Mimi e istrioni*; the sudden arrival by train of a stranger, Andrea 'il Gran Lombardo', to disrupt an already fragile balance among the characters in *Altri libertini*; the incredible emotional charge invested in that 'rullo d'asfalto' between Carpi and Modena in *Autobahn*, are all good examples of places reshaped by the writer's emotionality. All the characters in the book share a longing to get away. They dream of drifting away from Correggio, home of a 'morte civile ed erotica e intellettuale' (I, 91) to a new promised land, most likely the United States or a vague 'North', fantasized a thousand times in books and films. Nonetheless, the characters are still stuck in the provinces and even the experiences described in *Viaggio*, the most international of the six stories, seem to culminate in an unrealistic attempt to escape. The constant reference to American culture, even if with some intrusions from Arbasino, is at this point the most successful way Tondelli has to substantiate at least on the page his desire for an escape. Much of what he knows about the world outside Correggio derives from what he has read in books or seen at the cinema. All six stories are permeated by various forms of dialogic relationship with literature, cinema and music in a continuous process of contamination and hybridization that disregards the distinction between high and low culture and thus conforms to one of the fundamental features of postmodernism discussed in Chapter 1.



Contamination is a powerful instrument for producing formal innovation and it often operates by means of parody, debasement and ironic manipulation of stylistic levels and modes. The undermining of the integrity of the models handed down from the past and the intermingling of different languages and codes are two of the ways that allow Tondelli to create a complex texture that combines general intertextual features (such as the mixing of narrative voice with speech and of narrative discourse with spoken discourse) with more specific forms of dialogic relation with other pieces of discourse. In line with Kristeva's description of intertextuality as a borrowing and transformation of texts, Tondelli engages in a series of different kinds of reworking that also take into consideration the various effects they have on the reader and their functions for the writer. The desecration of canonical high culture by mixing it with low culture along with the attempt to break up the closed monolingual Italian literary tradition and the constant homage to admired writers and singers seem to be among his priorities. In *Altri libertini* we might differentiate on a micro-level at least three different manifestations of intertextuality: (a) direct quotations; (b) use and distortion of proper names; (c) creolization of lexis.

(a) **Direct quotations:** 'dicono che [...] ci sfracellano di botte e io, che son la Pia, penso a tagliare la corda' (p. 26, source: Dante, *Purgatorio*, V, 133); 'poi tutte interveniamo come fossimo sempre in ogni tempo e in ogni luogo dalle alpi alle piramidi cioè, dal manzanarre al reno' (p. 29, source: Manzoni, *Il Cinque Maggio*, ll.25-6); 'distesi sul letto a sentire dei dischi, lasciare che la musica entri nella testa e la riposi, luce morbida... Like a bird on the wire, like a drunk in a midnight choir I have tried in my way to be free, like a worm on a hook, like a

knight from old-fashioned...' (p. 71, source: Leonard Cohen, *Bird on a Wire*, 1969); 'il silenzio imbarazzato del dopopranzo dice tutto il peso che ho dentro, che mi prende il respiro e il cervello e non basta Tim Buckley, I am Young, I will live, I am strong I can give You the strange Seed of day Feel the change Know the way, Know the way...' (p. 71, source: Tim Buckley, *Goodbye and Hello*, 1967); 'lasciami entrare tra le tue braccia Andrea lasciami, ehi piccolo *I'll be your mirror...*' (p. 124, source: The Velvet Underground, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, 1967). Tondelli uses two main sources for the quotations presented in the short stories of *Altri libertini*. On the one hand, we have quotations taken from canonical texts of Italian literature that essentially have the intent of debasing their source. The insertion of these quotations in an unlikely context along with some textual marks, such as the replacement of capitals with lowercase letters, contributes to the disintegration of their original authority. On the other hand, we have longer quotations from works of American songwriters. These quotations are thoroughly absorbed in the text and, deprived of inverted commas or a distinctive font, do not respect the feature of *discreteness* identified by Stefan Morawski.<sup>11</sup> Their function is to channel a particular mental climate and to recall some specific associations shared by the writer and his readers.

(b) **Use, including distortion, of proper names:** 'si vanvera [...] delle nostre povere eroine Cinderella e Joan-of-arc oppure Alice o la Virginawulf' (p. 29); 'una Citröen DS a sei piazze tutta bianca [...] che sembra Moby Dick [...] e mi dico guarda questi giovani Holden come si dan da fare' (p. 37); 'ecco [...] la materializzazione di quel che docent maxima cum causa, e in stretto pas-de-deux

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<sup>11</sup> Stefan Morawski, 'The Basic Functions of Quotation', *Sign, Language, Culture*, eds. A. J. Greimas and R. Jakobson, The Hague, Mouton, 1970, pp. 690-705, p. 691.

Marshall Mc Luhan e Umberto Eco!!!' (p. 43); 'ci vorrebbe [...] Goldrake, via più veloce della luce!!!' (p. 104). These are just a few examples of the use or distortion of proper names practised by Tondelli in *Altri libertini*. The most notable example, which I shall discuss later in this chapter, of this form of intertext, is a passage commonly referred to by critics as the 'attico di Annacarla', a long and articulated list of types of incense, posters and books that covers more than two pages of the story that gives its title to the book. The use of proper names and their frequent distortion usually attest to the intention of the author either to devalue the authority of his sources or to elicit specific recollections in his readership. A good example in this sense is the reference to the character of Alice in *Mimi e istrioni*. Alice is a recurring presence within the movement of 1977 in Bologna and her popularity is linked to the university course organized by Gianni Celati at the DAMS between November 1976 and November 1977 that soon became a collective reading of the novel. The group A/Dams, the adventure of Radio Alice and the collective volume *Alice disambientata* provide evidence of the centrality of this character in the imaginative and heretical world of Bologna in 1977. *Alice disambientata*, edited by Gianni Celati, is especially important in terms of influence over the books published soon after. In the words of Marco Belpoliti

*Alice disambientata* costituisce una sorta di prova generale di quella scrittura falso-ingenua, lirico-sentimentale, ma piena di sprezzature e di apparenti intemperanze, che darà vita a romanzi come *Lunario del paradiso*, *Boccalone*, *Casa di nessuno* di Claudio Piersanti, ma anche *Altri libertini* di Tondelli, tutti libri che non sarebbero stati possibili senza la lezione di Celati e la sua idea di una scrittura letteraria modulata sul jazz, cioè aritmica e improvvisata [...] una sorta di scrittura *brut* che tuttavia [...] non perde di vista la sua vocazione saggistica, il suo riferimento a un

testo mille volte chiosato [...] (che) utilizza, per trattare temi assai complessi e ricchi di riferimenti culturali, una lingua al limite del gergale, tanto da dare al lettore l'impressione di un libro che-si-fa-parlando, mentre in realtà è stato costruito con grande pazienza e talento.<sup>12</sup>

(c) **Creolization of lexis:** 'il nostro tape è un very-very tape cioè una comunicazione quotidiana' (p. 44); 'loro canticchiano allegri e strafottenti [...] l'unica canzonaccia italiana che conoscono, poveri les suisses' (p. 51); 'Dormiamo [...] in uno scantinato che è poi una cave immensa e anche bella' (p. 52); 'Un uomo sui trenta si avvicina e guardandomi fa camman girando appena la testa' (p. 59); 'solo ora mi rendo conto di quei mesi invernali drunkato drunkato che ho rischiato di lasciarci le penne' (p. 72); 'grida di sparire, prender aria, raus raus, che non ti posso più vedere' (p. 79); 'Anna e Gigi [...] a Milano sembra se la passino comsì-comsà' (p. 81); 'Il settantasette inizia con Dilo e io a Paris, chez les folles' (p. 84); 'ci bacciamo [...] ma sono offset così offset che mi viene da vomitare' (p. 89); 'ci fermano ci sbattono in galera per il resto della nostra vita, kaputt' (p. 99); 'tutti i buon deutsch che ci saran lassù altroché Lombardi, veri Walhalla diomio!' (p. 129); 'carcassetta mia non abbandonarmi proprio ora [...] tanto non ci ho soldi damned damned! (p. 138); 'C'è notte fredda e buia [...] e qualche sagoma scura di Tir e qualche Mercedulo di buon doicc e qualche bicicletta' (p. 139); 'questi caromio, saranno i personaggi [...] del nuovo cinema [...] il DRUNK, very-drunk, CINEMA, ok?' (p. 141). The combined use of Italian and foreign languages, especially English, French and German, both in a correct and a distorted way, contributes a strong expressionistic note to the text. The clash of different linguistic codes accentuates the transgressive intents of the

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<sup>12</sup> Marco Belpoliti, *Settanta*, Turin, Einaudi, 2001, p. 269.

author and creates a new language that characterizes his generation. The constitutive elements of this strongly intertextual new language are not to be looked for in the traditional literary heritage, but rather in TV programmes, music, translations and even in the experience of mass education. It is a pop language that transcends the traditional division between high and low culture or between 'lingua media' and 'lingua letteraria', thus drawing a clear-cut line between opposing generations.

Tondelli is perfectly aware of his models and of the influence they have on his work, and he is not afraid of declaring his debts and gratitude. On the contrary, he seems so willing to do so that we have, even if only in the first edition of the book, a whole section, entitled *Titoli di coda*, where he mentions works, artists, friends and places that have influenced his own work or simply accompanied its creative process:

L'Art Director ha suggerito, assistito, apostrofato e supervisionato; Alberto Arbasino ha tracciato poetiche da cinebrivido ne *L'Anonimo Lombardo*, Gianni Celati incantevoli trame in *Lunario del Paradiso*, Michail Bachtin ottimi, davvero ottimi trip sul Romanzo Polifonico. *Doctor Piffo* ha fornito gentilmente i testi di Wyatt, Drake, Cohen, Buckley, Reed, Cockburn [...] La banda matta del *Simposio Differante* ha reso mondana e engagée la sopravvivenza a Correggio Emilia, l'hanno musicata i suonatori del *Giambattista Vico*, poi addolcita [...] gli amici della panchina e del *Covo Number Two* e di *Pace Agreste* e anche quelli che non devo nominare perché hanno lavoro fisso e obblighi sociali e non si possono sputtanare così per gioco letterario. La *Libreria del Teatro* di Reggio Emilia ha poi fornito volumi introvabili e letture a buon prezzo, la Regione Emilia Romagna invece la Scenografia, gli Arredi e il Guardaroba, associati Ente Turismo, Consorzi e Lega delle Osterie. Grazie a tutti quanti, grazie anche a chi non ricordo qui che ahimè lo spazio a nostra disposizione è terminato. Salute! (I, 1118-9).

Apart from the inevitable mention of what can be regarded as Tondelli's

intellectual pillars at the beginning of his career (Alberto Arbasino, Gianni Celati, Mikhail Bakhtin), it is worth underlining the presence here of a group of songwriters (Robert Wyatt, Nick Drake, Leonard Cohen, Tim Buckley, Lou Reed and Bruce Cockburn, often directly quoted in the book) whose songs constitute not a simple soundtrack but rather an emotional background, what Enrico Palandri calls ‘un percorso [...] inconscio collettivo, un essere portati dal proprio tempo [...] che si esprime in modo possente e incontrollabile e determina i destini’.<sup>13</sup>

The affinity between music and literature is a fundamental element in Tondelli’s prose. In his books, music and songs have a deeply structural and linguistic importance that derives from the way other people’s voices are incorporated in a text and mixed with the author’s words. Three different processes seem to be at work in Tondelli’s fiction: first we have the standard intertextual procedure of incorporating different voices—in this case the words of the songs—into the lexical-semantic level of a text. The second process consists in the absorption into a text of the phonic and non-semantic dimensions of a song. The tone, timbre and rhythm of songs are reproduced on the sound level of the text and turned into what Tondelli calls ‘codice sonoro’. Finally, we have texts modelled on music at a macrostructural level. This third process will become clear in Tondelli’s later works, namely in the polyphonic structure of *Rimini* with its multiple narrative threads and in the three long ‘movements’—modelled on minimalist music—that constitute the narrative backbone of *Camere separate*. Music can be used as a bridge to connect literature and reality and to determine a character’s nature: ‘you are what you listen to’ could be the axiom that sums up the role of music in his

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<sup>13</sup> Enrico Palandri, *Pier. Tondelli e la generazione*, Bari, Laterza, 2005, p. 63.

work. Furthermore, music strongly influences the writer's choices of words. In 'Colpo d'oppio', we read:

La scrittura emotiva è dunque sound, codice sonoro; è catena fonica; ma non è così, per esempio, la trascrizione di una registrazione al magnetofono di un qualsiasi cicaleccio. Si sente che non c'è niente di vivo, dopo. Lo sa [...] James Baldwin, che pressappoco dice che la tecnica letteraria di un "linguaggio reale" prevede sempre l'assunto che i personaggi parlino nel libro come parlerebbero nella realtà, se ne fossero capaci; ma poi, se questo avviene (cioè se la gente parla nel romanzo come nella realtà), è proprio perché lui—Baldwin—dice: "Non sono un registratore". (II, 780).

Language, through the reproduction of the spoken idiom, is therefore considered on the same level as sound; it is a vehicle to channel musicality. Nevertheless, the reproduction of spoken language is not to be taken literally; the sensitiveness and intelligence of the author should act as filters during this process of transformation. The role of the writer is not that of a mechanical recorder, and linguistic re-elaboration has to be regarded as an essential part of his work. In Tondelli's case, we could say that each one of his books has its peculiar and distinctive sound: the swift pace of *Altri libertini* and *Pao Pao*, the orchestral score of *Rimini*, the proximity to minimalist music in *Camere separate* are so many examples of the centrality of music to the writer's work. In the interview *Il mestiere di scrittore*—a collection of three conversations with Fulvio Panzeri that took place in 1989-1990—Tondelli declares:

Il mio desiderio è quello di produrre un testo che abbia un andamento interno analogo a certi ritmi musicali. *Rimini*, nelle intenzioni, voleva essere un'orchestrazione sinfonica, in cui si trovano gli "adagi", i "lenti", i "prestissimo" e un gran finale. È tutto un po' variato sui tempi e sull'accelerazione improvvisa, come in una sinfonia, in cui c'è un tema

che però viene di volta in volta giocato diversamente. Anche *Pao Pao* è molto musicale: l'ho pensato come una cantata di dodici mesi, una toccata e fuga. Del resto sento la musica molto vicina alla scrittura, come le arti visive. Credo che tutto ciò sia pertinente. (II, 978-9).

Music thus seems to pervade Tondelli's books, in keeping with his idea of literature as a multimedia project where different elements, taken from diverse media, are filtered and blended into a postmodern, unifying system: the book.

A first parallel of Tondelli's 1980s collection of short stories is with Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964); both books are episodic in their narrative structure and their authors seem more interested in investigating the possibilities of what Tondelli calls 'emotional literature' than in constructing solidly articulated plots. Furthermore, the two books made a dramatic entrance respectively into the American and the Italian literary worlds. Intended to outrage readers and to challenge conventions of decorum, restraint and the very idea of 'good taste' in fiction, they were both accused of immorality and obscenity, withdrawn from sale and their authors put on trial. *Last Exit to Brooklyn* was tried for obscenity in Britain, where its case was debated in the House of Commons, and was also banned in Italy, while Tondelli's book was withdrawn from sale following the decision of the Procuratore Generale in L'Aquila.<sup>14</sup> All the fuss about the novels contributed of course to their success; the attempts to censor them undoubtedly resulted in their being noticed and discussed even more than

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<sup>14</sup> The motivations given for the withdrawal of the books are similar.

Mr Leo Gradwell of the Marlborough Street Magistrates' Court pronounced that *Last Exit to Brooklyn* 'taken as a whole, would tend to deprave and corrupt, and I cannot think, in spite of the evidence I have heard, that it can be justified by literary merit.' Anthony Burgess, 'Introduction' to Hubert Selby Jr, *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, London, Paladin Grafton, 1987, p. XIII.

As for *Altri libertini*, it was argued that it should be withdrawn 'Per il suo contenuto luridamente blasfemo ed osceno nella triviale presentazione di un esteso repertorio di bestemmie contro le divinità del Cristianesimo; nonché di irriveribili turpiloqui [...] onde il lettore viene violentemente stimolato verso la depravazione sessuale ed il disprezzo della religione cattolica'. (I, 1112).



they might otherwise have been. At the heart of the trials was the accusation that the books were liable to harm, deprave and corrupt those people into whose hands they were likely to fall. In reality—and even though Selby's characters are marked by a deep ethical laziness that is not evident in Tondelli's—the books cannot be regarded as pornographic because pornography uses literary tricks to arouse the reader's excitement whereas both these writers eschew the devices of titillation. It is not Tondelli's intention, as it is not Selby's, to indulge in swearing and violence for the sake of it or to adopt a voyeuristic attitude; at the same time he cannot ignore these elements because they are part of the world he is describing and concealing them would mean depriving the reader of honesty and clarity.

The detailed description of drug abuse and sexual acts in the stories of *Altri libertini* is used by the writer to trigger a catharsis in his readership. Reading a book which is violent and sexually explicit or watching aggressive media output do not necessarily make the readers or viewers more aggressive or desirous of sexual transgressions. Quite the contrary, since the vicarious sex or violence experienced through the media could purge the audience of violent or sexual desires. If the result of watching violence is less aggression, then the result of reading an extremely explicit sex scene, as in the closing passage of *Postoristoro*, is the momentary abolition of sexual desire. This use of sex and violence places *Altri libertini* outside the reach of what we could call the 'third eye' that is to say the dark side of obscenity, the malicious disclosure of something presented to the public with no previous preparation.

The question of style is undoubtedly central in *Altri libertini* and *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. Anthony Burgess, writing about Selby's book, compares the writer's

style to a direct, machine-like transcription of reality. Selby writes with an urgency that forces him to pound the keys of his typewriter in the effort of recording conversations and interior monologues 'white-hot'. The immediacy created by this technique avoids the process of literary shaping. The cut and paste of passages, the rewriting of episodes are regarded as a possible loss of involvement and thus shunned by the author. Tondelli, naturalistic in his approach, but more traditional in his technique, does not appear to share this specific aspect with Selby. On the contrary, he said that he rewrote the stories for *Altri libertini* up to five, six times and that he insisted on changes 'finché non mi tolsero il manoscritto' (I, 1110). Despite this difference in attitude, some characteristics, such as the interior logorrhoea of the characters, accentuated by an impatient use of punctuation, seem to link the two books.<sup>15</sup> In the episode *Strike of Last Exit*, Harry, the main character, is tormented by the self-denial of his homosexual tendencies and finds himself stuck with a wife he hates:

For krists sake, what thefuck she smilin at? Got hot fuckin pants again. Always breakin my balls. [...] What the fuck ya smilin at? [...] Why cant she just leave me alone. Why dont she goaway somewhere with that fuckin kid. Id like ta rip her cunt right the fuck outta her.<sup>16</sup>

In *Postoristoro*, Giusy has to face the threatening presence of Johnny to whom he lends some money:

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<sup>15</sup> Tondelli, writing in 1987 about his first two books, describes their style thus: 'Lunghe pagine senza punteggiatura, ricordi del passato mischiati a una narrazione al presente. Brani di canzoni rock, motivi musicali, cadenze dialettali: insomma una lingua non letteraria, non libresca, non burocratica [...] Il tentativo [...] di scrivere come se [si] componesse musica [...] sentirsi alla macchina da scrivere come alla tastiera di un pianoforte [...] Il ritmo della frase-ora sincopato, ora disteso-riproduce sulla pagina un andamento musicale.' (II, 787-8).

<sup>16</sup> Selby, pp. 87-9.

Cazzo che vuole? Via, aria, che viene a fare questo imbecille al postoristoro, fra di noi che cazzo vuole il Johnny col suo Burberrys sfaragliante diosanto che vuol sapere, *stanotte fottuto d'un partigiano Johnny che cazzo vuoi?* (I, 11).

Tondelli probably reaches the highest degree of violence and horror in the first story of the book, *Postoristoro*, a livid and ghastly *mise en scène* of a night in the life of a group of drug addicts, prostitutes and dealers at the refreshment stand of Reggio Emilia's train station. It would be difficult to find a more hard-hitting debut; in classical place (the station) and time (one night) unities and without any great structural invention, the writer succeeds in creating a true metropolitan nightmare where each character seems only interested in satisfying his or her own basic needs. They are playing for the highest stake: surviving another night. The first paragraph of *Postoristoro* immediately displays some similarities with the opening story of Selby's book: *Another Day, Another Dollar*.

They sprawled along the counter and on the chairs. Another night. Another drag of a night in the Greeks, a beatup all night diner near the Brooklyn Armybase [...] A warm clear night and they walked in small circles, dragging the right foot slowly in the hip Cocksakie shuffle, cigarettes hanging from mouth, collars of sportshirts turned up in the back, down and rolled in front.<sup>17</sup>

Posto Ristoro, luce sciatta e livida, neon ammuffiti, odore di ferrovia, polvere gialla e rossiccia che si deposita lenta sui vetri, sugli sgabelli e nell'aria di svacco pubblico che respiriamo annoiati [...] maledette notti alla stazione [...] gli amici scoppiati pensano si scioglie così dicembre, basta una bottiglia sempre piena finché dura il fumo. (I, 5).

A strong correspondence is evident between the two settings: the bleak Posto Ristoro of Reggio's railway station is as unwelcoming and desolate as the 'beatup

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

all night diner' in Brooklyn described by Selby. A climate of relentless violence holds the centre in both of the stories. It is an aspect of city life that the authors force their readers to face with an unflinching eye, but nowhere in the stories do they appear to indulge gratuitously their graphic descriptions of brutality. One of the most senselessly violent episodes of *Last Exit to Brooklyn* is to be found in *Another Day, Another Dollar* only a few pages into the book. The gang that spends its nights at the Greeks faces three soldiers on their way back to the army base and one of them is brutally beaten up.

They formed a circle and kicked. [...] he was kicked in the groin and stomped on the ear and he screamed, cried, started pleading then just cried as a foot cracked his mouth [...] someone took a short step forward and kicked him in the solarplexus and he fell on his side [...] the blood in his mouth gurgled as he tried to scream [...] he vomited violently and someone stomped his face into the pool of vomit [...] their shoes thudded into the shiteatinbastards kidneys and ribs and he groaned [...] he gasped as a kick broke his nose [...] Freddy kicked him in the temple and the yellowbastards eyes rolled back and his head lolled for a moment and he passed out and his head splashed and thumped to the ground.<sup>18</sup>

In Tondelli's *Postoristoro*, the most horrifying passage is the closing scene of the story. One of the characters, Bibò, is suffering withdrawal symptoms and his friend Giusy is desperately trying to find a heroin dose to help him. When he finally manages to get hold of the drug he brings Bibò to the station's toilets and tries to inject him with the dose, but the man's veins are swollen and useless. The extreme resolution of Giusy then is to sexually excite Bibò in order to inject the drug in his penis. The scene is brutal. What follows is the first part of it.

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

Giusy si smuove d'un colpo da quell'intontimento. Gli scopre le braccia, bestemmia. "Non c'ha vene, cazzo Rino non c'ha più vene buone!" Rino grida di fare presto che non ne può più: "Avanti sbrigati!". Giusy gli stringe il laccio ma le vene non escono, gli incavi lividi e neri e più su macchie gialle di sangue rappreso, niente da fare. Allora gli afferra il cazzo, lo tira su e giù, tenta di masturbarlo, farglielo diventare duro, Bibò continua a sudare e svuotarsi di merda acquosa e sbavare e sempre grida di tenerlo lontano da quel buco che sta scivolando, lentamente ma scivola, perdio è già nella merda fino alla pancia e ficca le unghie nelle braccia di Rino che bestemmia e guarda Giusy, la sua mano che scopre il cazzo del Bibò. "Ma che fai, sei pazzo?" "Taci imbecille, taci!" grida. "Vattene via! Prepara la siringa!" Liza si fa sulla porta, sbotta in un Oooooohhhh e una bestemmia. "Stai alla porta cazzo" sbraita Rino "se entra qualcuno siamo fregati tutti!" (I, 21-2).

Furthermore, some of Tondelli's characters seem to have been modelled on Selby's drop-outs: Vanina, the prostitute, who is still so young but already old and wasted, with her terrifying experience of group violence, closely recalls the tragic figure of Tralala.

10 or 15 drunks dragged Tralala to a wrecked car in the lot on the corner of 57<sup>th</sup> street and yanked her clothes off and pushed her inside and a few guys fought to see who would be first and finally a sort of line was formed [...] the guys from the Greeks came over and some of the other kids from the neighbourhood stood around watching and waiting [...] guys left the car and went back on line and had a few beers and waited their turn again and more guys came from Willies and a phone call to the Armybase brought more seamen and doggies and more beer was brought from Willies and Tralala drank beer while being laid and someone asked if anyone was keeping score and someone yelled who can count that far [...] and more came 40 maybe 50 and they screwed her and went back on line [...] and soon she passed out and they slapped her a few times [...] but they couldn't revive her so they continued to fuck her as she lay unconscious [...] and soon they tired of the dead piece and the daisy chain broke up [...] and the kids who were watching and waiting to take a turn took out their disappointment on Tralala and tore her clothes to small scraps put out a few cigarettes on her nipples pissed on her jerked off on her jammed a broomstick up her snatch then bored they left her lying amongst the broken bottles rusty cans and rubble of the lot.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 82-3.

una notte i terroni caricano la Vanina su un furgone e dopo si depositano in campagna [...] e poi si mettono spogliati nudi davanti a lei e Vanina abbassa gli occhi a vederli tutti lì [...] nudi e dritti e coi denti bianchi e sfavillanti al buio e lei montanara disambientata, [...] abbassa gli occhi e guarda e balbetta *che volete fare?* non lo sa, però l'intensità della scossa fra le gambe sale e stringe lo stomaco e le tempie si inumidiscono leggere e tiepide cha paiono bacciate dalle perle e allarga le braccia e trema, troppo bella quella scossa, troppo diretta al cuore e Vanina che abbassa gli occhi...Dopo la violentano tutti insieme facendo il turno sopra e sotto e in bocca e fra le tette che aveva già grandi e grosse e la abbandonano nuda coi suoi straccetti imbiancati da un lato e dieci carte infilate davanti e quando i contadini la trovano all'alba Vanina se ne sta ancora lì a gambe aperte e ride e dice di lasciarla nel fossetto che sta bene e allora s'è capita che i terroni avevano buttato dentro anche anfetamine o altri acidi qualsiasi, e fino a Natale se ne restò al San Lazzaro perché fatta fatta, anche nel cervello e continuava a chiedere a tutti di portarla in campagna, in quel fossetto *che c'ho lasciato le mutandine mie*. (I, 15).

The same desperate desolation surrounds the lot covered with rubble on the outskirts of the city where Tralala is left lying and the ditch up in the mountains where Vanina almost loses her sanity: they epitomize not merely the depravity of Brooklyn's policeless streets or the violence of Postoristoro but the evil of the whole world. The only substantial difference between them is that, while Tralala dies the way she has lived, Vanina, for whom the group violence is an introduction to life, lives on to maintain her role as a wasted and embittered receptacle of the material and the savage.

After such a harsh opening, the book seems to hold its breath for a while. The second story, *Mimi e istrioni*, is a transient sketch of provincial life, with the Po Valley reshaped into a large and mobile province 'di stampo americano' (II, 1014). The idea of movement is central in the story and its characters move restlessly from one place to another, thus multiplying the possible narrative strands. The episode, characterized by a marked irony, is full as we have seen of

decontextualized quotations from highbrow poets, such as Dante and Manzoni. Tondelli uses these quotations as popular sayings, depriving them of all their erudite character and integrates them within his personal aesthetics that is usually exemplified or embodied by the characters in the text. Behind these quotations is an attempt to reshape reality and common beliefs through the appropriation of the Italian literary tradition, seen to some extent as the embodiment of officiality. Indeed, the Splash's endeavour to conquer R  z (Reggio Emilia) is completely based on an unrealistic challenge to *  pater le bourgeois* through free radios, self-awareness groups and sexual transgressions. The Splash girls raid the space between Modena and Reggio, but with few positive results, either against 'i maligni' or for the Splash themselves: 'c'   quasi nausea per quegli anni sbandati e quel passato che vorremmo anche noi rigettare assieme alla Nanni, quel pomeriggio vuoto di febbraio' (I, 48). February is the time of the final awareness—as September was, earlier on in the story, the time for a momentous change. Emptiness is what remains in the hands of these improbable predators when they realize the impossibility of reshaping the surrounding landscape that can always be covered, but never mastered. This use of the passing of time suggests to Giulio Iacoli an interesting parallel with one of Raymond Carver's most disturbing stories, *Fat*:

Compare la parola "vuoto" e compare anche l'indicazione del periodo conclusivo dell'esperienza [...] in una notazione quasi attinta al linguaggio poetico, comune ai brevi tocchi di certa scrittura americana contemporanea, nell'area del cosiddetto minimalismo; si veda l'affinit   strutturale con la chiusa dell'esemplare racconto *Fat* di Raymond Carver [...] "She sits there waiting, her dainty fingers poking her hair. *Waiting for what?* I'd like to know. It is August. My life is going to change. I feel it." Come nel *cool jazz* di Carver, a sensazioni e valutazioni riguardo un

determinato tempo della propria vita, si associa la notazione del mese, a far scorrere, sul fondo, il passaggio ciclico dei ritmi vitali, con in più, nella fine della giovinezza in Emilia, la morte di un paesaggio interiore.<sup>20</sup>

The end of this condensed *Bildungsroman* coincides with a compulsory truce with the enemy and with the awareness of another life taking place on the other side of that wall that the characters have consciously built up between themselves and established society. Jumping that wall is usually a painful experience and so is the passage from youth to another, more mature attitude towards life.

This effort to establish a society with different rules and values while coming to terms with the passing of time is the constant leitmotiv of *Viaggio*, opened by one of Tondelli's typical 'American' reshapings of the Via Emilia:

Lungo la via Emilia [...] incontro le indicazioni luminose e intermittenti, i parcheggi ampi e infine le strutture di cemento e neon violacei e spot arancioni e grandifari allo iodio che si alzano dritti e oscillano avanti e indietro così che i coni di luce si intrecciano alti nel cielo e pare allora di stare a Broadway o nel Sunset Boulevard in una notte di quelle buone con dive magnati produttori e grandi miti. (I, 49).

*Viaggio* is another example of an abridged *Bildungsroman* constructed with two different timeframes: the present (the time of the narration) and the past (the time of the events narrated in the story). These two timeframes are also symbolic of the growth of the first person in the story, of his passage from youth to maturity. From a structural point of view, this story is generally more self-contained and well-balanced than the other two and offers a change of perspective of great importance: for the first time in the book, the characters are allowed to go somewhere out of their province, to roam in Amsterdam's Vondel Park, in

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<sup>20</sup> Iacoli, p. 98-9.



Kilburn, in Brussels. They eventually get the chance to see at least a small part of the world, rather than dream and talk endlessly about it. Their perception of places is totally based on their senses: Amsterdam is cold and hostile ('è sporca e puzza. Sui canali c'è tutta la sozzeria umana che riesco a immaginare'; I, 59), Brussels is

meno cara di Parigi, più provinciale e più nordica. Ci serve per smaltire l'esame di maturità e i sonnolenti anni dell'apprendistato. Scopriamo tutt'insieme la birra, il sesso, les trous. (I, 51).

It seems to be the perfect starting point between the two poles, the province and the North, around which Tondelli wanders in his first book. As for London, it will later become one of the most important locations in his work, but here it is presented under an extremely negative light. The narrator, at this point of the story, is forced to stay in Correggio, and this break from the tiring routine of his university life is at first perceived as a punishment, but slowly becomes a sort of purifying truce with the world. When he becomes involved in a 'spedizione' to London, he hardly wants to leave and the whole journey is conducted under this negative spell. London seems immediately to embody the protagonist's bad temper and when he is finally caught up in a fight, he decides to leave. His stay in the English capital is therefore a thoroughly unconstructive experience, to the point that he declares, radically: 'Londra mi fa schifo' (I, 90). Still, it is not really that the place is awful (in actuality the city is more a sort of detached and inattentive spectator than anything else); it is the narrator's attitude which is uncooperative. Again, a place is reshaped by the writer's emotional attitude into a mindscape rather than a landscape. We could almost consider *Viaggio* as the pivot of the whole book, with its long flashbacks and the presence of some of Tondelli's

favourite themes, such as the continuous wandering between Italy and the rest of Europe, the self-introspection, the escape from the insinuating provincial spleen, and the failure symbolized by the recurrent return to Correggio. Tondelli always displayed an ambivalent attitude towards his hometown. Correggio can be regarded, by virtue of the Autobrennero motorway, not far from its urban centre, as the extreme outskirts of Berlin, a starting point from which to leave the province, but also the last resort for a tired body, a secure landing after the storm of a journey, as is made clear in the London episode. At the end of a whole life spent trying to get away from it, Tondelli himself will decide to die in Correggio, back for good in its reassuring maternal womb. Nonetheless, all the characters in *Viaggio* incessantly move from one place to the other, never satisfied, never settled down. The only quiet place seems to be the next one; ‘monadi alla deriva’<sup>21</sup> in a mainly hostile world, these youngsters remind us of mice running on a wheel in their cage, lively and quick, but invariably stuck in the same place.

‘Like a bird on a wire/like a drunk in a midnight choir/I have tried in my way to be free’: Leonard Cohen’s 1968 song perfectly embodies their desperate effort to be free. Compared to the first two episodes, *Viaggio* seems to be a decisive step forward; Tondelli himself seems to be more aware of his role as *faber* of the narration. He no longer needs to show off through quotations his knowledge of books and records and films, which is an effective way to communicate feelings and thoughts, but could also be a possible trap, a colourful, fascinating, but empty wrapping. Instead, in this story he constantly tries to go straight to the point, without embellishments. The importance of this

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<sup>21</sup> Iacoli, p. 20.

straightforwardness and simplicity is clarified in the last sentence of the episode: 'Sulla mia terra, semplicemente ciò che sono mi aiuterà a vivere' (I, 96).

*Senso contrario*, the fourth story in the book, is a rather secondary episode, a wild entertainment that falls between the 'concentration' of *Viaggio* and the story *Altri libertini* which follows it. It is the chronicle of a 'sera noiosa e ubriaca' (I, 97) lived on the borders of legality, but without the desperation of *Postoristoro*. In a way, the characters in *Senso contrario* seem more closely related to the Splash girls than to the outcasts of the first story. Tondelli seems to be aware of this and inserts in it a meta-narrative hint, when the protagonists meet at a crossroad 'una Dyane rossa con quattro scalmanate sopra' (I, 104), who evidently are the Splash girls. They wander incessantly between their small town and the countryside, lost in their vain rebelliousness, only to find out at the end an unbearable emptiness which recalls the closing of *Mimi e istrioni* when the girls admit a sense of 'nausea per quegli anni sbandati e quel passato che vorremmo anche noi rigettare assieme alla Nanni, quel pomeriggio vuoto di febbraio' (I, 48) whilst the narrator in *Senso contrario* concludes his story with the following words: 'guardo dal finestrino la città perdersi nella periferia la campagna sfilare...Sento come mi fosse improvvisamente cresciuto dentro un vuoto enorme.' (I, 106).

*Altri libertini* instead is characterized by a more ironical and disenchanted attitude towards life. The windmill of longing, arguments and desire that revolves around Andrea, 'Granlombardo supervitaminizzato [...] virgulto omogeneizzato del sessanta' (I, 116), is the pretext for relating the adventures and frustrations of a group of students who prefer to recreate the university environment indoors rather

than live it day by day. The attic of Annacarla, 'biblioteca di una generazione', is a well-articulated list of tastes and tendencies of the 1970s that testifies to Tondelli's cultural background and is also part of that large group of intertextual relations based on the use and listing of proper names. For its importance and centrality, it is worth a further examination. The list can be roughly divided into four subsections, each one devoted to a different cultural artefact:

**1. BOOKS:** Instead of giving a list of writers and titles, Tondelli concentrates here on publishers and series:

gli Oscar Mondadori sparsi qua e là e tutt'intera la collezione dei Classici dell'Arte Rizzoli impilata come pronta alla rivendita tra la collana grigiobianca di Psicologia e Psicoanalisi di Feltrinelli, gli Strumenti Critici Einaudiani e quelli di Marsilio e di Savelli un po' bistrattati in seconda fila accanto alle Edizioni Mediterranee e alla Biblioteca Blu e ai Centopagine e ai rari Squilibri, troppo pericolosamente accanto agli Adelphi e ai Guanda civettosamente sparsi accanto ai beverage. (I, 112).

**2. JOSS STICKS:** This is one of the longest parts of the text and recalls Arbasino's penchant for long, complicated listings:

incensi Made in India sempre accesi e sparsi, dai secchissimi bastoncini Musk di Lord Shiva agli aromi primaverili dei Bouquet dei Three Birds e a quelli Agarbatti cioè Jasmine, Patchouly, Rose, Amber, Violet, Chameli, Lotus, Mogra e quegli altri cofanetti sparsi del Panda Brand Incense ancora Ambregris e Jasmine, eppoi Sandal Wood e Cypre vicini quasi a confondersi coi sottilissimi Meigui Xiang, Tan Xiang, Tisian Tsang altri bastoncini fragili e sottili e puzzolenti anche dalle loro scatole cellophanate come quelli impastati al talco, i tibetani Wing Tun Fook pestilenziali davvero. (I, 112).

**3. PICTURES:** This is the most intricate part of the whole list:

posters e manifesti e gigantografie accatastate e usate come seggiole, oppure appesi alle pareti [...] la foto di Carlos e Smith [...] all’Azteca di Città del Messico [...] Mark Frechette e Daria Halprin spersi nel boro di Zabriskie Point [...] i capelli zizzeruti di Pierre Clementi nei Cannibali di Liliana Cavani, il viso spigoloso di Murray Head a confronto col pacato Peter Finch in Sunday, Bloody Sunday e [...] Al Pacino in Panico a Needle Park e [...] la città frontiera di The Last Picture Show, il ciuffo di Yves Beneyton nei Pugni in Tasca, quello di Giulio Brogi in La Città del Sole, Sotto il segno dello Scorpione, l’Invenzione di Morel e anche una foto di scena di John Mulder Brown che abbraccia la sagoma di Jane Asher nella piscina di Deep End e un’altra di Taking Off, una di Joe Hill, una delle Quattro Notti di un Sognatore che lambisce il volto di Hiram Keller nel Satyricon di Fellini che un po’ si confonde con le locandine del Fantasma del Palcoscenico e quelle di The Rocky Horror Picture Show [...] e le fotografie [...] autografate come quella di Francesco Guccini, di Peter Gabriel, di Marco Ferreri ritratto per le giornate del cinema italiano il due di settembre del settantatré. (I, 112-3).

#### 4. RECORDS: A short, but indicative selection of musicians:

vecchiaroba ma ottima dei Jefferson Airplane e Soft Machine, qualcosina dei Gong e degli Strawbs e qualcos’altro di Lou Reed. (I, 113).

Although many of the details (the seemingly endless list of types of incense; the pictures and posters so carefully catalogued) could seem pointless and pedantic when considered outside their context, Tondelli exploits this sort of verbosity in order to convey a strong sense of identity and generational uniformity which is fundamental to an understanding of the whole book. In *Il mestiere di scrittore*, referring to the generational features of his first book he declares:

per *Altri libertini* non mi scandalizzava la sua definizione di libro “generazionale”, nel senso che io stesso avevo cercato in un certo senso di raccontare quelli che potevano essere chiamati dei “percorsi generazionali”. Quando scrivevo i racconti di quel libro cercavo un determinato pubblico e avevo un’idea di lettore. Volevo comunicare ad

altre persone che avessero più o meno la mia età. Non mi interessava il cosiddetto “mondo degli adulti”, né quello della critica ufficiale, e non certo per snobismo, ma per il solo fatto che non li conoscevo e non li frequentavo. *Altri libertini* è scaturito così da un forte desiderio, quasi feroce, di una persona abbastanza giovane che cercava di comunicare con gli altri, non avendo altro modo per poterlo fare. (II, 981-2).

The scene of Annacarla's attic comes after a long preparation; all the references scattered in the book seem to move towards this climax. After many quotations, jokes, puns, the moment comes for Tondelli to collect all these elements together, to supply them with an independent space in which they can finally acquire a fulfilled meaning and work as an inventory of a whole generation. Especially important seems to be the part in the list devoted to all the incense sticks—‘pestilenziali davvero’—used by the 1970s generation: they contribute to creating an olfactory space where people can recognize their friends and enemies from their smell and from the fragrances that surround them. This idea of odour as a sign of immediate recognition is very strong in Tondelli and is linked to his idea of youth as a tribe separated from the rest of the world and voluntarily living in a self-constructed reserve which, paradoxically does not have any kind of borders, but is as wide as the world and only limited by the presence or absence of other inhabitants. As natives who smell the air while on the tracks of a prey, these youngsters put their noses in the air when searching for a friend, a possible lover or even an enemy. They perceive the goodness or wickedness of a place through its smell (consider the remark about Amsterdam as ‘dirty’ and, above all, ‘smelly’).

The idea of *smellscape* becomes almost obsessive in the last story of the collection: *Autobahn*, an on-the-road elegy suspended between the Via Emilia

(Correggio, the Autobrennero, the Po Valley) and the West (which symbolizes the dream and the chance for freedom). To escape from his 'scoramenti', the protagonist decides to leave for the mythical North which is substituted here for the traditional myth of America, following its wild and free smell along the Autobrennero,

che è l'autobahn più meravigliosa che c'è perché se ti metti lissù e hai soldi e tempo in una giornata intera e anche meno esci sul Mare del Nord, diciamo Amsterdam, tutto senza fare una sola curva, entri a Carpi ed esci lassù. Io ci sono affezionato a questo rullo d'asfalto perché quando vedo le luci del casello d'ingresso, luci proprio da gran teatro, colorate e montate sul proscenio di ferri luccicanti [...] mi succede una gran bella cosa, cioè non mi sento prigioniero di casa mia italiana che odio, sì odio alla follia tanto che quando avrò tempo e soldi me ne andrò in America, da tutt'altra parte s'intende, però è sempre andar via. (I, 134).

Throughout his journey the narrator is haunted by the smell of the North that seems to call him:

d'un tratto fiutato nel marzo pazzarello un buon odore, allargati i polmoni, litri e litri di buon odore dentro, che gioia l'ho ritrovato il buon profumo selvatico e libero, non lo farò scappare. Accidenti a te respiro mio che non ti riesce di trattenerlo dentro un po' di più questo odorino, ma fatti forza allarga il naso, sì l'hai ritrovato, esulta e impreca, all'inseguimento, e via! (I, 133).

Every stop, every delay, even the girl he meets at the service area, a malicious siren ready to hold up this young Ulysses, seems dramatically to disrupt his plan. He knows that he cannot stop and wait, his attention must be continuous, he must be careful not to let his guiding smell dissolve into the thin air of the night.

Il mare, il mare! Io non posso fermarmi qui, ho il mio odore da seguire,

devo correre, l'autostrada mi aspetta, non ci ho tempo caramia! [...] Odore, odorino mio di Mar del Nord, di libertà e gioventù [...] Dimmi che ci sei! Me ne giro col naso all'aria nella piazza di sosta Adige e cerco il buon odorino che se non lo trovo al più presto m'infogno in questa puzza d'italietta e muoio, cioè perdo la rotta e allora che diverrà mai di me perduto con i porci scoramenti addosso? (I, 137-42).

As Iacoli points out, the character uses his sense of smell as a 'bussola'.

Le emozioni e il "fuori" del protagonista vengono posti in relazione tra di loro e si aprono all'esperienza e al riconoscimento del luogo grazie al valore intimo, di bussola del proprio odore.<sup>22</sup>

The final paragraph of the book is completely extroverted: from the ghastly lights of *Postoristoro*, we arrive, through a complicated roundabout at the chance of a new beginning under the blessing of this new guiding light:

Cercatevi il vostro odore eppoi ci saran fortune e buoni fulmini sulla strada. [...] alla faccia di tutti avanti! Col naso in aria fiutate il vento, strapazzate le nubi all'orizzonte, forza, è ora di partire, forza tutti insieme incontro all'avventuraaaa! (I, 144).

### Tribal Life: 'Pao Pao'

In 1982, Tondelli published, again with Feltrinelli, his first novel, *Pao Pao*. In a short essay written in 1984, *Post PAO PAO*, the author sums up the content of his book in the following way:

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.



tutta la storia raccontata altro non è che il resoconto della vita di una piccola tribù—come si diceva nel 1977—che si trova a campare in un territorio straniero [...] il fatto che la trama si svolga tra le caserme della patria e dentro divise dell'esercito costituisce solo l'atmosfera, il contenitore, l'occasione narrativa. Il vero romanzo è proprio quello più generale della vita di un gruppo intorno all'istituzione, dentro, fuori o laterale. (II, 784-5).

The word 'tribe' generally refers here to those young men obliged to serve in the army and to live in the foreign territory of the barracks, but it is also, as underlined by Roberto Carnero in his *Lo spazio emozionale*, a hidden reference to the sub-tribe of homosexual boys enrolled in military service. In Italian military jargon a P.A.O. is a Picchetto Armato Ordinario, a guard duty of two hours, interrupted by four hours off duty, for a total shift of twenty-four hours. Nevertheless, Tondelli's use of the word seems somehow alienating and out of context; in the title, a boring military duty is transformed into something exotic and gentle whose sound recalls a 'ciao ciao' shouted from a distance. It would be possible to see in this distortion a reference to a collection of short stories by Uberto Paolo Quintavalle, owned by Tondelli and called *Pao Pao. Anticamera del paradiso* (1965), where Pao Pao is the name of a Polynesian harbour.

Tondelli arrived at the draft of the novel after a series of collateral and preparatory writings that help us reconstruct the context of the book. Of the greatest importance is a section collected in *Un weekend postmoderno* and entitled *Affari militari*, a sort of retrospective of books and films with a common military setting. We have here references to, among other works, Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), Derek Jarman's *Sebastiane* (1976), Carson McCullers's *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), Robert Altman's *Streamers*

(1983) and J. R. Ackerley's *My Father and Myself* (1968). These books and films, though heterogeneous, share the same importance in the construction of Tondelli's novel, even if they do not usually have its light touch. *Pao Pao* is based on Tondelli's experience of military service (done in Orvieto and Rome, from April 1980 to April 1981), but it is not an autobiographical novel.

The role of diary of his 'naja' is instead found in *Il diario del soldato Acci*, ten episodes published weekly in *Il Resto del Carlino* and *La Nazione* from 15 February to 10 May 1981. In these short episodes it is easy to recognize many of the characters and events of the novel, although the latter's narrative perspective is lacking. The episodes, in other words, do not have a homogeneous development, are not consequential and are without conclusions. These features are a consequence of the weekly deadline of the project, but also sometimes of the cutting and the different assemblage of certain episodes, and are also attributable to the fact that Tondelli wrote the pieces during the last months of his military service, among all sorts of impediments, and when, by his own admission, even his mind and creativity were on 'servizio di leva'. It is interesting for an understanding of the tone of the diary, and consequently of the novel itself, to read what Tondelli had to say about the chance of transforming *Il diario del soldato Acci* into a TV series. His project was that of a

commedia divertente, ironica, a volte drammatica, a volte satirica, recitata da un gruppo di giovani di diversa estrazione sociale e di differente esperienza che però si ritrovano uniti in quei dodici mesi a confronto con un'istituzione e un mondo completamente a sé stante e separato. Nessun atteggiamento vittimistico, quindi: solamente dei 'racconti naturali' in cui la reazione del pubblico viene sollecitata con la risata, il divertimento, la satira e anche la commozione. (I, 1137).

It is worth underlining a couple of elements from this short quotation. The first is the optimistic attitude towards military service, which differentiates Tondelli's military production from the works by Mailer and others mentioned above. The latter are characterized, on the contrary, by a dramatic approach to military life, whose key element usually coincides with a homosexual condition. In *Pao Pao* homosexuality, an extremely relevant theme, is not considered something tragic. Francesco Gnerre tries to highlight the new condition of being a gay soldier as it is presented in some twentieth-century Italian novels.<sup>23</sup> The characters in these novels are no longer left alone with their tragedy; rather, they are part of a new alternative cultural system and are finally able to share the same tastes and needs with other people whom Tondelli ironically calls 'consorelle della patria'. The second element is the multiregional dimension of the life in the barracks. Tondelli constantly exploits all the possibilities that arise from this chance encounter among people from the most diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds. There is only one thing they always have in common and that is the 'enemy': the military and bureaucratic apparatus that appears to be a parody of everyday life. Tondelli's *mise en scène* is a sort of military cabaret where no one is free to stay the same. Once in its spiral, people are forced to change, even in a petty and unpleasant way, and the growth of his young soldiers often involves the awareness of being not only 'generosi e disponibili e forti e coraggiosi, [ma] anche meschini, calcolatori e vigliacchi' (II, 186).

Focused on military service, a traditional rite of passage, *Pao Pao* is, in the words of its author,

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<sup>23</sup> Francesco Gnerre, *L'eroe negato. Omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano*, Milan, Baldini & Castoldi, 2000.

la storia di un servizio militare *diverso* [...] il tentativo di fare un romanzo sentimentale su un gruppo di giovani usando uno stile ritmico e rock, fatto di impennate romantiche, di riflessioni, di improvvise accelerazioni. (I, 1138).

The style of the book has been considered for a long time its most distinctive feature; in his review (*L'Unità*, 25 November 1982) Alberto Cadioli wrote:

L'interesse di *Pao Pao* è soprattutto in quella scrittura in continuo movimento, in continuo trapassare di tempi verbali, in lunghe sfilze di parole allineate, magari con rime interne e forte carica ironica. Una scrittura, dunque, che si fa essa stessa struttura narrativa. (I, 1141).

The story itself starts *in medias res*, as we can see from the first lines of the novel.

Ma Renzu, il mio grande amico Renzu, lo rivedo dunque per l'ultima volta in una parata primaverile di granatieri a Roma, a quasi un anno da quel nostro primo e gelido inizio di servizio militare su alla rupe di Orvieto, fine aprile dell'ottanta o giù di lì. (I, 183).

This sudden beginning gives the reader the feeling of an already existing external connection, and what is written on the page seems to be only a small part of a larger picture, of a fragmentary memory. This idea of fragmentation, of particles of a story floating on the page, dominates the whole book: different episodes and faces mingle; comedy and drama coexist on the same page. The leitmotiv of this apparent confusion is the estrangement connected to the military life: being unable to define their new status is the most unnerving thing for Tondelli's young soldiers. The reassuring borders of the family and of civil society are lost, but they have not yet been replaced by the new military borders: the young men are no

longer civilians, but not yet soldiers. This sensation of non-belonging is constantly underlined by Tondelli. In the eighth episode of *Il diario del soldato Acci*, Acci, on leave for a few days, comes back home and falls into a terribly depressed mood:

Sdraiato finalmente sul letto a contemplare questo orrendo *down*, questo inquieto ammaraggio nella mia vecchia atmosfera, la musica che andava, la sigaretta che tirava, è arrivato un grosso colpo di vuoto. E la mia testa che continua a martellare: “Sono un soldato, o sono ancora quel che ero prima di partire?” E mi accorgo che a questo non c’è risposta, ora: non sono né l’uno né l’altro, non il dovere e non il tempo passato; sono soltanto bloccato in una zona di coscienza *mu*. Sono semplicemente una persona diversa e nuova, e non riesco a interpretarmi. (I, 169).

Andrea Canobbio, in his *Piccolo Abbecedario delle Occasioni (Per Arginare l’Oblio)* also highlights this dichotomy between civilians and soldiers, which seems to be typical of the entire period of military service and not only a momentary symptom of puzzlement during the first few days:

Essere borghese, ritornare borghese: i congedanti all’ultimo stadio, guardati da tutti con un’invidia che non si può capire se non la si è provata, si fanno ormai chiamare “borghesi”. Il mondo è diviso in due, e due sono le divise: anche “essere in borghese” significa indossarne una. Durante il servizio militare si prende gusto alle cose più banali: bere un cappuccino in un bar, camminare per la strada, dormire a casa (le cose che i borghesi fanno sempre). Inutilmente nel linguaggio ufficiale si usa il termine “civile”: in gergo si continua a dire “borghese”, è il vestito che determina lo status.<sup>24</sup>

Tondelli confirms this perspective when just after the beginning of *Pao Pao* the main character declares his first feeling of displacement.

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<sup>24</sup> *Panta*, p. 39.

Io guardo al di là della finestra sbarrata. Scorgo un signore che esce di casa col cagnolino al guinzaglio. Ho il primo piazzamento da che son partito, dico vedi, tutto questo per un anno non sarà tuo, non ci saranno spese o compere da fare, non ci sarà libertà di andare e vagare, non ci sarà mai un gesto così automatico e per questo così immensamente libero e slegato e autonomo come quello di quel signore che si sta aggiustando il cappello, che sorveglia il barboncino, che esce a passeggio. Potrai fingere, oh questo sì, ma ora sei un soldato e tutto per te è archiviato. (I, 190).

It is worth underlining here that both Acci and the novel's main voice become aware of their new condition spying outside the barracks and witnessing banal scenes of everyday life: a child riding his bicycle, a man taking a walk with his dog. These are the concrete signs of something different that has just happened in their lives; only in those stolen moments do they realise they now have a different place in society. As in a traditional *Buildungsroman*, the military service is a shadow line, a test that needs to be passed in order for the protagonist eventually to grow up. Though based on Tondelli's usual structural archetype of 'fuga—stallo nevrotico—ritorno',<sup>25</sup> *Pao Pao* could be considered the first example of that progressive internalization that will be characteristic of his later works. Except in *Altri libertini*, the journey coincides with a real movement and the stories are identifiable by what could be called an on-the-road structure. In his later works, this same structure gives the impetus to other kinds of movements, which are internal and usually related to the affective life of the characters. In *Pao Pao* each external move is doubled by another, more important and internal, movement. As Enrico Minardi writes:

In *Pao Pao*, dato l'universo chiuso in cui la vicenda si svolge, sono soprattutto i movimenti di coscienza a essere oggetto dell'attenzione

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<sup>25</sup> Enrico Minardi, *Pier Vittorio Tondelli*, Florence, Cadmo, 2003, p. 37.

dell'autore, in quanto la questione a cui l'autore pare qui voler rispondere è proprio quella della ricerca di un punto di fuga in sé stessi, nel momento in cui ogni movimento fisico di fuga verso l'esterno è bloccato, è impedito all'origine.<sup>26</sup>

This form of captivity is extremely productive from a literary point of view because of the very nature of the barracks as microcosm, with its peculiar hierarchies, alliances and rituals. It is a form of parallel universe. According to Foucault space is not an empty box that waits to be filled, but rather a culturally constructed entity. It is part of the general cultural web and—like any cultural entity—is formed and changed.

nous ne vivons pas dans une sorte de vide, à l'intérieur duquel on pourrait situer des individus et des choses. Nous ne vivons pas à l'intérieur d'un vide qui se colorerait de différents chatouillements, nous vivons à l'intérieur d'un ensemble de relations qui définissent des emplacements irréductibles les uns aux autres et absolument non superposables.<sup>27</sup>

Foucault divides the 'emplacements' into two groups characterized by the way they 'suspendent, neutralisent ou inversent l'ensemble des rapports qui se trouvent, par eux, désignés, reflétés ou réfléchis'.<sup>28</sup> They are:

(a) **Utopias**: that is to say 'les emplacements sans lieu réel [...] qui entretiennent avec l'espace réel de la société un rapport général d'analogie directe ou inversée'.

(b) **Heterotopias** : which Foucault describes as

des lieux réels, des lieux effectifs, des lieux qui ont dessinés dans l'institution même de la société, et qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d'utopies effectivement réalisées dans lesquelles les

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<sup>26</sup> Minardi, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Des espaces autres', *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, no. 5, October 1984, pp. 46-9, p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.

emplacements réels [...] sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés'.<sup>29</sup>

He then proceeds to explain—within the frame of what he terms *hétérotopologie*—the six basic principles of heterotopias.

1. Heterotopias are a constant of all cultures and can be divided into two main categories. On the one hand we have—in primitive societies—*hétérotopies de crise* that consist of sacred or forbidden places reserved for people—for instance adolescents, pregnant women or old people—who are, in relation to the environment in which they live, in a state of crisis. These crisis heterotopias have almost completely disappeared in modern societies, even though it is still possible to find some reminiscence of them in institutions such as the boarding school and military service. The heterotopic value of these places was connected to the fact that they normally hosted the first manifestations of sexual maturity in young men, manifestations that were supposed to take place elsewhere than at home. The barracks in *Pao Pao*—along with the ‘sub-heterotopia’ of the *Compagnia Fantasma* where the narrator and his friends hide from the eye of the official military life—have this same function of hosting the sentimental and sexual education of the recruits. On the other hand we have what Foucault calls *hétérotopies de déviation*—such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals—where individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the norm are placed.

2. Heterotopias have the capacity of changing with society. In Foucault’s words

chaque hétérotopie a un fonctionnement précis et déterminé à l’intérieur de

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.



la société, et la même hétérotopie peut, selon la synchronie de la culture dans laquelle elle se trouve, avoir un fonctionnement ou un autre.<sup>30</sup>

3. Heterotopias have the ability of juxtaposing in a single real place several different places usually incompatible with one another.

4. Heterotopias are connected to time and to the way it is perceived within them. They are usually linked to slices of time that Foucault calls *hétérochronies* and they function at their full potential when the individuals involved arrive at an absolute break with traditional time. In this sense *Pao Pao* is a good example because in it time is a strange issue: in the first half of the novel, the author tells the story of his arrival in Orvieto, of his two months' training period and of his departure to Rome, where the actual military service will finally take place. The rest of the book, less than one hundred pages, is covered instead by the recounting of his ten months' stay in Rome. The book's temporality seems to be connected to internal processes and mental associations rather than to the calendar. Tondelli's decision to use the changing of recruits' ranks to mark the passing of time seems to be in this sense quite revealing.<sup>31</sup>

5. Heterotopias—which always presuppose a system of opening and closing—are at the same time isolated and penetrable by the surrounding reality. Heterotopic places are not freely accessible and can be entered either under compulsion or by means of rites of purification. In *Pao Pao* Tondelli describes an exit rite—staged by a group of soldiers at the end of their military service—in all its senseless brutality:

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>31</sup> There is something similar in *Altri libertini*, too: in the short story *Viaggio*, Tondelli beats the passing of time using the protagonist's birthdays.

il capostecca urla voglio cinque spine, datemi cinque spine e tutti i suoi scagnozzi a vedere fra le foto che teniamo attorno alla branda chi è dello scaglione più giovane. Così ne beccano cinque spauritissimi e appena appena arrivati e li mettono in ginocchio e li fanno ubriacare e se questi non bevono li reggono in tre-quattro e gli gettano la canna in gola e ben presto uno di questi si mette a vomitare e strafogare e allora lo buttano via con una pedata stampata nel didietro. Insomma spostano le brande e così il corridoio si allarga eppoi il najone dice ora vi faccio vedere la corsa e così dicendo monta sulle spalle di uno di questi e prende a cavalcarlo come un cane e gli altri pure e tutti urlano perché i quattro son partiti e corrono come indemoniati a carponi. [...] Poi i quattro arrivano al traguardo e i ragazzi che han fatto da stalloni si gettano in terra stremati e calpestati dagli anfibì lerci degli altri che versano vino e birra e whisky nelle loro gole senza soluzione di continuità [...] ben presto alcuni cominciano a rantolare e vomitare a casaccio sulle brande e sui vestiti [...] Altri najoni invece passano dalle brande e dicono presentati e mettimi sull'attenti e bacio il cazzo che per me è finita buccine e per te malefica spina c'è ancora una vita. (I, 293).

6. The last trait of heterotopias described by Foucault is connected to their function in relation to all the space that remains outside of them. This function unfolds within two poles: on the one hand we have *hétérotopies d'illusion* whose role is to create 'un espace d'illusion qui dénonce comme plus illusoirement tout l'espace réel, tous les emplacements à l'intérieur desquels la vie humaine est cloisonnée'.<sup>32</sup> On the other we have the *hétérotopies de compensation* that is to say 'un autre espace réel, aussi parfait, aussi méticuleux, aussi bien arrangé que le nôtre est désordonné, mal agencé et brouillon'.<sup>33</sup>

The barracks with all its heterotopic implications can be either accepted or rejected by the people who live in it. Those who are unable to cross the border of this alternative dimension are condemned to remain in a state of adolescent limbo, they are the dropouts, another species of military fauna, well described by Tondelli in *Ufficiali e gentiluomini*, the closing chapter of *Affari militari*:

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<sup>32</sup> Foucault, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49.

Drammatizzando oltre ogni ragionevolezza il servizio militare si rischia, realmente, di sfiorare la tragedia. A tutti sarà capitato di incontrare qualche esemplare di quella fauna che passa da una licenza di convalida all'altra, da un ricovero "in osservazione" [...] a un periodo di congedo, per poi rientrare al corpo per un paio di giorni, essere rinviata al Celio, ottenere una nuova licenza e così via [...] Vagavano, questi ragazzi, come fantasmi nelle camerate. Senza mostrine sulla divisa, ma ancora con le stellette del CAR, nonostante il loro scaglione si avviasse a celebrare quei fatidici cento giorni all'alba che permettevano l'ingresso nella bieca gerarchia della camerata [...] Non avevano indumenti né mimetiche né drop [...] né un armadietto né la branda [...] Erano i veri paria, senza diritti, evitati da tutti [...] Erano, insomma, l'immagine dello scoppato, la figura vivente di quello che avrebbe potuto fare di te il militare se l'avessi presa male: un fantasma intristito e vuoto. (II, 183-4).

For these vacuous characters, punished by the senior officers with hours of purposeless inactivity, what seems to be lost is the principle itself of every formative experience: the willingness to be tested in order to become an integral part of society. They are overwhelmed by the fluidity of the borders in their new environment, they do not know how to handle them and are therefore stuck in their original positions. The protagonist and his friends are instead characterized by the opposite attitude: they are more than willing to experience, to possess their new territory. If the Splash girls in *Mimi e istrioni* could not manage to conquer their own space, despite their desperate efforts, the soldiers in *Pao Pao* seem to be successful in stealing some space from the army and in recreating a new microcosm based on shared values and beliefs. They are stubborn and obstinate and in this obstinacy they find their way out of the military bureaucracy. In the same place where the dropouts found themselves lost, they find vital energy. Fluidity and change are their sheet anchor.

The protagonists' vitality is constantly echoed by what may be considered

the main theme of the novel: friendship. *Pao Pao* is a continuous variation on the theme of friendship (and, in its second part, of love) and especially on that peculiar kind of friendship that develops among people who live, even if only for a while, in a strongly characterized and homogenizing situation. The military life brings the most diverse variety of individuals close to each other, and this closeness could even break some well-established prejudices usually connected to education and class. This could be considered another side effect of that fluidity of borders so distinctive of the soldier's life. On his arrival in Orvieto (or, rather, 'Orvietnam', as Tondelli calls it), the protagonist thinks of himself as an exposed nerve, desperately looking for someone to attach to. The first pages of the novel are full of these silent explorations:

E già sul convoglio ho fiutato immediatamente altri visi e altre storie, ragazzi che partivano come me per la prima volta [...]olgevo lo sguardo attorno come un matto, volevo vedere e sapere e digià conoscere, non seguivo la fila degli altri che parevano mezzi condannati a morte con la testa bassa e lo sguardo spento, io mi sentivo un fuoco di curiosità e soprattutto la voglia di cominciare e di andare dentro [...] ci si mette la coscienza in pace e allora si possono aprire gli occhi e guardare e curiosare e allacciare immediatamente sguardi di complicità, scrutare i muri, sbirciare i cessi, odorare le camerate e i corridoi [...] piazzarsi all'interno dell'ambiente, e circondarlo del tuo self, allungare e protendere la propria storia per inscenarla lì. (I, 186).

As in *Altri libertini*, the sensations of the protagonist are channelled through the surrounding smells. The barracks is another *smellscape* and following familiar smells will be the best way for the protagonist to find partners to form his new tribe. The first approach to the military world is characterized by curiosity and eagerness, the barracks is a mysterious world, ready to be explored. The metaphor is very clear from the beginning. The description of the warehouse (I,

198-9) where the uniforms are kept seems to be modelled on that of Jonathan Harker exploring Count Dracula's castle for the first time: the warehouse is 'scuro e buio come un inferno', its shutter rises up with a 'cigolio cimiteriale, uno skreech rullato' that makes the narrator shiver. The corridor heading for the main room is 'strettissimo e infinito [con] odore pungente di naftalina e umidità' and its walls are covered with 'scaffali altissimi che si perdono nel soffitto invisibile' from which are hung, like dead bodies, all the still, empty uniforms. This gloomy Gothic scene is interrupted by an unexpected comic reversal, typical of that idea of 'gaya naja'<sup>34</sup>, not only in the homosexual sense of the word, but also according to a more general amused attitude applied by Tondelli to military service, which is fundamental in *Pao Pao*. An example is the description of the army's seamstress:

grassotta, occhialuta e kapò che ficca le mani dappertutto [...] corre come un'ossessa fra un séparé e l'altro, dà il benessere [...] Si dedica a tutti [...] ha [...] lo chignon ispido di forcine, un lapis mangiucchiato tra i denti, occhiali con la catenella, scrive, detta [...] le sue mani cicciotelle arrivano dappertutto. (I, 200-1).

After these first, cautious steps, there finally comes the awareness of not being completely alone in this new and still unknown world, as Acci proudly declares in his diary:

la cosa più importante è questa qui: finalmente io, Acci, non sono più solo. Ho scovato i miei alleati. Ormai faccio parte di una gran bella tribù. E tutto, piano piano, comincia a ricrescere. Comincia a rifluire il tempo della mia vita. Non sono più solo, siamo ormai una tribù. (I, 156).

All the relationships born during military service have in common the trait of

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<sup>34</sup> According to the definition given by Alfredo Giuliani in his review of the book in *La Repubblica*, 16 November 1982.

precariousness—the end of the C.A.R. (a short period of training for newly-arrived soldiers), a sudden transfer or the end of the ‘naja’ shape these friendships into time-limited ones. This uncertainty and fluidity of relations and the awareness of the uniqueness of these ‘allentati momenti da gaglioffi’, push the book’s protagonists towards an extreme form of exploitation of their time. Nevertheless, this sharp consciousness of precariousness does not help in making the departures less painful for those who stay behind:

Ma la notte degli addii fu terribilmente languida e malinconica, mi perdevo nelle grandi braccia di Renzu, gli dicevo vedrai vedrai [...] e fu tutto uno scambiarsi affettività ed indirizzi e guardarci un po’ curiosi come ragazzi che non si sarebbero più rivisti, quasi a voler trattenere nel pensiero un viso, una mano, una parola e pensare che tutto quel tempo dell’affiatamento e delle carinerie e degli amori era già finito, quindi ti guardo perché mi pare—dannazione—di non averlo fatto mai. (I, 254).

In *Pao Pao* there is a strong impulse towards retracing a deeper meaning in these brief encounters. These ‘frammenti di storia condivisa’ must be filled up with other, and less extempore, stories in order finally to make sense. Being part of a ‘tribe’ becomes, then, a sort of mark for life that makes those who carry it recognizable, even after a long period because:

Le occasioni della vita non stupiscono mai abbastanza nella loro insensata frammentarietà che poi un bel giorno miracolosamente si salda in una sottile e delicata vibrazione che riaccorda e riannoda e uniforma il tono di diversi percorsi e allora, nonostante i dolori e le precarietà dei nostri anni giovanili la vita sembra rivelarsi come una misteriosa e armonica frequenza che schiude il senso e fa capire; e allora in quell’attimo abbagliante tutto pare ricomporsi nella gioia di sentirsi finalmente presenti agli occhi della propria storia, la pazzesca consapevolezza di trarre a sé tutti i fili intrigati e sparsi del proprio passato come sta appunto succedendo a me, ora, nella luce calda di questa città in cui ogni giorno, miracolosamente, incontro qualche personaggio di questa storia che vi sto

raccontando a distanza di anni da quando è accaduta. (I, 309).

The threads of life always seem to find a way to turn all these fragments into a meaningful story: this appears to be the ultimate sense of all of Tondelli's books. As we will see in the following chapters in our examination of *Rimini* and *Camere separate*, all his characters struggle to find, in an elusive and fluid world, 'il fantasma della loro terza persona', another self whom they often seem to look at, but do not necessarily recognize.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Ersatz Realities: *Dinner Party and Rimini***

It is the reference principle of images which must be doubted, this strategy by means of which they always appear to refer to a real world, to real objects, and to reproduce something which is logically, and chronologically, anterior to themselves. None of this is true [...] images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction.  
(Jean Baudrillard)<sup>1</sup>

#### *Tondelli as Playwright: 'Dinner Party'*

The bridge between the strong generational appeal of *Altri libertini* and *Pao Pao* and the postmodern experimentalism of *Rimini* (1985) is to be found in *Dinner Party* (1984-86), Tondelli's only play. The lack of a more substantial theatrical output by Tondelli should not deceive his readers: he always had a constant and fruitful relationship with the world of theatre. During the 1970s he worked within a theatre cooperative and contributed to the realization of a stage version of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le petit prince* (1943). Furthermore, throughout his career Tondelli wrote several articles about the activities of numerous independent companies. To further underline his connection to theatre, in a 1985 interview he declared: 'mi sento più legato non agli scrittori ma a certi gruppi teatrali o

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images*, Sidney, Power Institute Publications, 1987.



musicali' (II, 958). During the same year, he also planned to write, for *Il Corriere della Sera*, a series of five interviews

a personaggi del mondo dello spettacolo, della moda e dell'arte, condotte sullo stile di altrettanti dialoghi teatrali: ricreare sulla pagina tutte le sfumature del parlato attraverso una radicale operazione stilistica. Interviste assolutamente nuove e "scritte", che avranno una piacevolezza narrativa come in un testo teatrale. (I, 1162).<sup>2</sup>

In light of this, *Dinner Party* seems therefore to be the natural result of Tondelli's constant interest in the theatre. The genesis of the play appears to have been long and complicated, both because of external circumstances and because of the writer's own priorities, especially the difficult and slow writing of *Rimini*. There are at least five different drafts of the play, whose variants are all carefully reconstructed by Fulvio Panzeri in his 'Note' to *Dinner Party* (I, 1145-64). The first version was apparently written hurriedly by Tondelli between the end of March and the first days of April 1984, in a period of financial and inspirational crisis, during a stalemate in the composition of his second novel. In a 1984 interview with Marina Garbesi for *La Repubblica* he declared:

È una storia di trentenni, di una generazione a cui è difficile affibbiare delle etichette, un dramma un po' violento e un po' sofisticato. L'ho finita una settimana fa. Ci dovrò lavorare ancora un mese, ma sono soddisfatto. La commedia era un genere ancora inesplorato per me, e mi entusiasma [...] Ero bloccato su un nuovo romanzo [*Rimini*], non riuscivo ad andare avanti, a trovare il finale giusto. Stranamente la liberazione è venuta pensando al teatro. *Dinner Party* l'ho scritta di getto. Due settimane di lavoro, giorno e notte. Il plot era quello di un mio vecchio racconto, che doveva diventare un romanzo e che, invece, s'è trasformato in una commedia originale, serrata. (I, 1146-47).

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<sup>2</sup> Tondelli only carried out of these interviews: with the theatre company I Magazzini (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 18 December 1985) and with Carlo Maria Mariani (*Flash Art*, March 1987). Both interviews are now in *Opere II*, respectively pp. 258-65 and pp. 280-6.

The idea of writing a novel on the generation of the thirty-somethings, and particularly on their parties around Europe, was originally developed by Tondelli between 1982 and 1983. The proposed title for the book was *Un weekend postmoderno* and it was:

Un titolo praticabile [...] per un'ipotesi di romanzo sui primi anni ottanta [...] bisogna inserire il tutto in quegli anni di grande divertimento, di grande liberazione, di grandi feste, party, con il grande boom del video, per cui c'era tutta una fauna d'arte [...] questa euforia, con molte iniziative [...] Era come uscire dalla cappa degli anni settanta attraverso la creatività [...] *Un weekend postmoderno* era per me il tentativo, poi rimasto sulla carta, di fare un romanzo proprio traducendo, trascrivendo le parlate di questi party. Praticamente dovevano essere cinque, sei, sette feste, una a Firenze, una a Bologna, una a Milano, una a Londra, in cui si descriveva con una lingua molto cantata, quasi poematica, molto mischiata, con i dialoghi inseriti, senza virgolettature nel testo, con una lingua abbastanza strana...Anche come leggibilità era molto forte, troppo forse. (II, 990-1).

It is possible to read three fragments of this projected novel, never completely realized, in the eponymous section of *Un weekend postmoderno* (II, 187-206). There is a passage in particular that describes the frantic atmosphere of those years, which could be used, as Fulvio Panzeri suggests in his 'Note' (I, 1150), as an interpretative key to the play:

Si esce di casa e si sale sulle auto con tutto un codazzo che sembriamo un corteo di nozze e i drink in mano, tanto per non smettere l'abitudine. Si arriva in galleria dopo aver percorso sensi unici e direzioni vietate, tutte però permesse dalla nostra targa estera, e infilato i casseri e le porte, sui viali, come anelli, uno dietro l'altro. E lì, in galleria, è tutto un balletto e una frenesia di strizzate di mano e bacetti sulle guance e pacche sulle spalle, che ci fanno sentire subito a nostro agio, e gente che non si vedeva da anni e invece eccola qui, con le solite squizierie di linguaggio e i soliti vezzi stralunati. (II, 195).

*Dinner Party*—allowing the analysis, for the third time after *Altri libertini* and *Pao Pao*, of the generation of his contemporaries now in their thirties—appears to be a decisive step towards the leave-taking from the 1980s that was becoming essential for his growth as a writer and as a person. In an article written in 1991, but full of chronological allusions to the years of the first writing of his play, Tondelli writes:

Il “weekend postmoderno” capitò più o meno in quel periodo: un fine settimana della Bologna trend che, al pari di tanti altri, si annunciava con qualche festicciola, un salto in discoteca, l’inaugurazione di una mostra [...] E invece fu un trascorrere da un’emozione a un’altra come nessuno avrebbe immaginato: una contestazione punk alla sfilata di moda organizzata il venerdì da un amico fiorentino [...] una nottata nel Bronx di Borgo Panigale, con ritmi afro e Talking Heads e molti bevaggi. Poi gallerie d’arte e graffitisti e un conclusivo omicidio domenicale, come nei migliori weekend di Agatha Christie.

Per me, gli anni ottanta finirono già lì, nel 1983, durante quel fine settimana dove, sotto l’apparenza di una festa mobile di ragazzi allegri, e anche scatenati, si rivelarono la follia dei rapporti, l’eccesso di certi riti e anche la paura. Dopo fu solamente il momento dell’osservazione e della riflessione, del lavoro sul materiale più o meno autobiografico. (II, 621).

The ‘omicidio domenicale’ to which Tondelli alludes is that of Francesca Alinovi, one of the first art critics in Italy to recognize the importance of the works of Keith Haring and other graffiti artists:

La scomparsa di Francesca Alinovi—lei era la sola “sacerdotessa” di una Bologna creativa che osannava gli eccessi estetici e quindi era un unico, inimitabile punto vitale, in una città sempre più burocratizzata—ha fatto praticamente finire tutto. (II, 997).

The awareness of being at the end of an age will be a strong theme throughout *Dinner Party*.

The commonly read edition of the play is the third one, posthumously edited by Paolo Landi in 1994 for Bompiani. A fourth edition was completed in the summer of 1985 for the ‘Premio Riccione-Ater’ for the theatre with a slightly modified title: *La notte della vittoria - Dinner Party*, which ironically reverberates the play’s content, focused on a certain resigned bitterness. The plot of the play is summed up thus by Tondelli himself:

Una commedia borghese, di conversazione, in cui un gruppo di personaggi si riunisce per una cena la sera dell’11 luglio 1982, quando l’Italia vince il Mundial di Spagna. Parallelamente agli echi della partita, sulla terrazza di casa Oldofredi si consuma un gioco crudele, fatto di colpi di scena, tradimenti, rivelazioni e ambiguità. (I, 1162).

Two opposite poles can be isolated in the play. On the one hand we have a rather conventional social satire directed at the urban setting. On the other, we have a more introspective work. This second layer is probably the more significant and features all the mechanisms of classic theatre such as confessions, discoveries and recognitions that build up the tension until the closing scene, constructed around a relentless series of events.

The choice of title may have been influenced by T. S. Eliot’s *The Cocktail Party* (1950), with which Tondelli’s play seems to share some general features. Eliot’s play, like Tondelli’s, opens on a party scene characterized by the same feeling of superficiality that seems to permeate *Dinner Party* and then evolves towards the same profound themes, including identity and guilt. The use of a social gathering—where stories of no consequence are being told and gossip seems to be the order of the day—as a setting for clashes and painful clarifications puts the audience in the position of facing the classic situation of the calm before

the storm. A subtle tension grows beneath the jokes and the trivia, until a point of no return: all that was never said, all the accusations that were never made must finally come to light. Throughout the play, the role of the author is that of the master of ceremonies, the one who poses all the questions, the one who creates the expectations and prepares the surprises for the final *coup de théâtre*.

The half-brothers Goffredo (Fredo) and Manfredi (Didi) Oldofredi are the hinges on which the whole play revolves. Fredo is a lawyer and patron of young artists, but he conceals, behind his decorum, a guilty double life that he is incapable of publicly confessing: he is homosexual, and his interest in Alberto, a graphic artist who lives in the Oldofredi's flat, goes far beyond a mere artistic attention. Didi, the younger brother, is probably the most complicated and important character in the play. A writer and an alcoholic (two features that make him a precursor of the character of Bruno May in *Rimini*), Didi is also the critical conscience of the play. His lack of social etiquette and his brutal and partly alcohol-induced paucity of diplomacy provide the play with its ideological content.<sup>3</sup> The main target of Didi's sarcasm is the superficiality of the so-called 'creatives' of the 1980s, represented here by the character of Alberto. According to Paolo Landi, *Dinner Party* is not only the story of a family adrift in a sea of lies and misunderstandings; it could also be regarded as a snobbish list of the likes and dislikes of the thirty-something generation, of which Tondelli himself was part.<sup>4</sup> The third scene of the first act is particularly meaningful from this perspective: it is almost entirely dominated by Didi's 'I-like-I-don't-like' game whose result is to leave the spectator with a perfect portrait of the 'look-generation, video-

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<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of Didi as the critical conscience of *Dinner Party*, see Minardi, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> *Panta*, pp. 69-73.

generation, atomic-generation' (I, 350) that inhabits: 'l'Internazionale Occidentale. [...] l'impero senza più province: solo un grande cuore occidentale che pulsa in perfetta sincronia' (I, 358). Describing to Mavie his habits—along with those of Alberto and Fredo—Didi explains that

[...] Alberto [indossa] solo coordinati Calvin Klein comprati da Bloomingdale's. [...] Fredo indossa solo [camicie] fatte per lui da Brooks Brothers e le allaccia con la collezione di gemelli di mio padre. [...] tutti e due guardano il televisore, tuttavia [...] tengono acceso lo schermo. Perché Alberto usa il televisore senza audio. Solo immagini, mia cara. È la video generation. (I, 352-3)

He does not differ much from those bored, young Americans portrayed by Bret Easton Ellis in his *Less Than Zero* (1985) and *American Psycho* (1991), thus confirming Didi's idea of the existence of the 'Internazionale Occidentale'. A particular way of looking at generations is central to Didi's view of the world:

Non esistono più le generazioni; tutto si consuma troppo in fretta. È quello che dico anch'io. Non esistono proprio le generazioni stratificate ogni venticinque, dieci o due anni. Sono delle spaccature verticali, degli abissi che fendono diacronicamente il tempo. Lo sforzo sta tutto nel non essere accomunati agli altri poiché nessuno che abbia meno di trent'anni è accomunabile a un altro, è un coacervo di stili altrui, è il vertice, l'apoteosi dell'inautenticità. (I, 354-5).

Human beings are not the only ones involved in this apotheosis of faking; even urban topography seems to have been reshaped by that 'banalità assoluta che ha dominato un decennio perverso, in cui l'unica realtà possibile era quella data dall'apparenza'.<sup>5</sup> Borders and city limits have changed, distances have shrunk:

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<sup>5</sup> *Panta*, p. 71.

everything seems to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Two examples of this situation are given in the play respectively by Fredo and Didi:

FREDO Parto da Fiumicino con una canzoncina in testa: *When You Call Me Lover*. Scendo due ore e mezzo dopo a Heathrow e, nella hall, la filodiffusione me la rimanda. Tre giorni dopo parto per New York, arrivo al Kennedy, salgo sull'elicottero e, zac!, *When You Call Me Lover*. Una settimana dopo, sono a Los Angeles, stessa storia. Affitto una Buick e corro nel New Messico. Sulla strada, accendo l'autoradio e cosa sento?

FREDO e DIDI *When You Call Me Lover*.

FREDO Torno in Italia e, a Cagliari, Radio Nuraghe trasmette: "Eccovi ora l'ultima novità".

FREDO, DIDI e MAVIE (*cantando*) *When you call me lover*  
*To say me*

*I am your beautiful hunter.*

FREDO È questa, Didi, che chiami l'"Internazionale Occidentale"?

DIDI Certo, fratellino. (I, 358-9).

ANNIE L'altro giorno cercavo Palazzo Campolungo. Ho chiesto a un ragazzo.

DIDI Che tipo era?

ANNIE Uno qualunque. Mi risponde subito: "Palazzo Campolungo? È facile. Attraversa la strada là di fronte ad Armani. Svolta a destra dov'è Gianni Versace. Prosegui dritto verso Gianfranco Ferrè. Fai altri venti metri, passa di fianco a Gucci e, proprio all'angolo, infila un vicolo. È il retro dello show-room di Missoni. Be', quel vicolo sbuca sulla piazza". "È facile," diceva. A me sembrava di essere a Pitti Donna. "Poi," dice, "attraversa la piazza dalla parte dei negozi. Non puoi sbagliare. Ci stanno Biagiotti, Fendi, Ungaro e Lancetti. A destra c'è Palazzo Campolungo. Vai lì, nella sede di Valentino?"

(*Jiga esce.*)

MAVIE Delizioso, quel ragazzo.

FREDO Vorrei sapere che ne pensano Mazzini, Cavour e Garibaldi a essere così spiazzati. (I, 378).

This second passage is very important for an understanding of the ideas of *mindscape* and hyper-reality that will be central in *Rimini*. The existence of a different attitude towards the city and its urban structure is obvious in Tondelli's work. No longer considered from a traditional point of view, the city is reshaped

by the influence of new values, in this case, fashion and consumer-driven mapping. Giandomenico Amendola makes an interesting distinction between *cityscape* and *mindscape* that is consistent with the above-quoted extract from *Dinner Party*. According to his study, this change in the relationship between the city and its inhabitants is not due to architectural transformations, but rather to a different attitude of the city's residents:

Il problema è che le cose non stanno sempre come sosteneva Baudelaire, il quale scriveva che “*la forme d’une ville change plus vite que le cœur d’un mortel!*” e che, cioè, la forma fisica della città cambia più rapidamente dell’anima della sua gente. L’anima sembra che, invece, stia mutando molto più rapidamente dello spazio costruito della città [...] A connotare la città postmoderna sono [...] le nuove culture, i sogni, i desideri e le paure della sua gente, la varietà delle nuove tribù urbane, la nuova domanda di città. È all’interno di questo segmentato [...] scenario che la nuova città [...] acquisisce rilevanza [...] Le architetture postmoderne non sono la città postmoderna [...] Sono solo un aspetto della postmodernità. Se il cityscape, il panorama fisico [...] è ancora solo in parte postmoderno, il suo *mindscape*, il panorama dell’anima e delle culture della città, è già profondamente segnato dalla nuova stagione. Per questo motivo, l’impatto del postmoderno sul *genius loci* della città è evidente [...] ed il nuovo clima lo si può immediatamente respirare nella metropoli contemporanea indipendentemente dalle forme architettoniche.<sup>6</sup>

In *Dinner Party*, Milan has not changed its urban planning under the influence of fashion designers; the change is rather in the eyes of the person who is looking at it. The postmodern flâneur presented by Tondelli is simultaneously attracted by the idea of beauty, which is the pivotal idea of his *Weltanschauung*, by his hedonistic attitude and by the central need of the postmodern subject (especially that of the 1980s): to accumulate and consume time and money in an endless collection of souvenirs and experiences:

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<sup>6</sup> Giandomenico Amendola, *La città postmoderna. Magie e paure della metropoli contemporanea*, Bari, Laterza, 1997, pp. 6-7.



Il flâneur contemporaneo è insieme Homo Aestheticus, Homo Ludens e, soprattutto, Uomo Consumatore. Egli è pronto ad acquistare e consumare l'esperienza di cui è protagonista senza che questa riesca a scalfirlo o ad impegnarlo realmente. La contraddizione tra un concetto, quello di esperienza, che presuppone un coinvolgimento profondo, ed una pratica di gioco e di rappresentazione che rinvia, invece, alla superficialità e all'indifferenza esiste ma esprime le modalità inedite con cui la gente vive la città nuova contemporanea.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1980s, postmodern architecture was still relatively rare in Italian cities, which were usually characterized by a certain reluctance to change consolidated practices and structures, but postmodernity was already rooted in the desires of the people living in the cities. As Giandomenico Amendola writes: 'Con i piedi siamo nella scena fisica della città consueta e con la testa nella città mediale della iper-realtà e dell'immaginario'.<sup>8</sup> These ideas, whilst only anticipated in *Dinner Party*, will become essential in *Rimini*. In this novel, characterized by a strong postmodern influence, a whole city will be involved in a game of mirrors and references and the borders between reality and hyper-reality will become more and more arbitrary and elusive.

#### 'Rimini' as a polyphonic novel

Towards the end of May 1985, Tondelli published *Rimini*, a controversial book which nonetheless was to be the only real best seller of his career. The book marked the writer's passage from Feltrinelli to Bompiani. This move seemed to give him a new enthusiasm and also the possibility of experimenting with a new

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<sup>7</sup> Amendola, p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

type of story, based on what he called a ‘visione polifonica del romanzo’. In a letter to François Wahl, his French translator, dated 21 January 1985, he wrote:

Sto lavorando molto alla stesura di questo libro (*Rimini*) [...] Il fatto di aver cambiato editore mi dà un entusiasmo nuovo. Sono già stato criticato per questo (‘L’infedelissimo Tondelli’, *La Stampa*) eppure ho ancora più voglia di fare questo romanzo e di farlo con il nuovo editore. Il “nuovo corso” della Feltrinelli non mi offriva, io credo, sufficienti garanzie per l’uscita. *Rimini* è un romanzo di tipo nuovo per me. Ho voluto staccare anche con la mia vecchia immagine di “enfant terrible”. Vedremo poi i risultati. (I, 1171).

The writer’s polyphonic project is explained in the ‘Scheda di Presentazione di *Rimini*—Bologna, 12 novembre 1984’ as a

sistema strutturale, solo apparentemente fluido, [in cui] la comprensione di alcuni episodi si attua al di fuori del testo, cioè nella testa del lettore [...] Questo gioco dell’entrare e uscire dalle trame con altri punti di vista narrativi è quello che io chiamo “visione polifonica del romanzo” ed è quella che vorrei realizzare con questo romanzo. (I, 1166).

Tondelli’s idea of the novel as a polyphonic structure is largely based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s studies on polyphony and heteroglossia and on the work of Julia Kristeva on intertextuality discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. In order to realize his idea of polyphony, Tondelli creates a complicated web of different stories, which are coordinated according to three different types of relation:

1. **PARALLELISM**: the stories are independent and never touch each other;
2. **FORTUITOUS MEETING**: the stories touch, but do not influence, each other;
3. **MUTUAL INFLUENCE**: the stories touch and influence each other.

The various forms of polyphony used by the writer create a strong link between the postmodern aspects of *Rimini* and its intertextual dimension. The continual interweaving of multiple plots, pastiche and the mixing of styles that is so characteristic of the book presupposes the existence of dialogic relations with other texts: not necessarily named texts by specific authors—as in the case of Raymond Chandler discussed below—but also with different types of texts, literary genres and registers.

It is very difficult to reconstruct clearly the plots and sub-plots of the book. To have an idea of the general structure of the novel, it is interesting to read what Tondelli himself wrote in the ‘Nota per la quarta di copertina’ to help Bompiani prepare the definitive edition of the book:

*Rimini* è innanzitutto il tentativo di costruire un romanzo “polifonico” in cui la pluralità delle voci (i personaggi) si sviluppi in una pluralità di punti di vista (le trame) [...] il testo chiama continuamente il lettore a operare collegamenti, rimandi, riferimenti prendendolo nel vortice delle sue trame:

- la storia del giornalista Marco Bauer inviato in Riviera per dirigere “La pagina dell’Adriatico”
- la storia di Beatrix Rheinsberg antiquaria berlinese calata in Italia alla ricerca della sorella scomparsa
- l’avventura di due giovani amici romani decisi a raccogliere i fondi necessari a finanziare il loro primo film
- la storia di un suonatore di sax, delle sue notti e delle sue albe, dei suoi rientri in pensione
- la parabola terminale di uno scrittore arrivato a Rimini per partecipare all’assegnazione di un premio letterario
- la storia di una pensione familiare dagli anni cinquanta a oggi, dalla ricostruzione al boom, alla crisi degli anni settanta raccontata in presa diretta. (I, 1173).

The first consequence of this complex project is the strictly symmetric structure of the book: *Rimini*, with its ostensibly fluid organization, is divided into two parts and each one is composed of seven chapters. At the end of each part there is an

italicized interlude and the whole novel is closed by an explanatory chapter.<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, such a strict structure is the inevitable result of the polyphonic multi-voicedness and apparent freedom of the book. A similar paradox was noted by Bakhtin in his discussion of the ‘independence’ of characters in novels:

It might seem that the independence of a character contradicts the fact that he exists, entirely and solely, as an aspect of a work of art, and consequently is wholly created from beginning to end by the author. In fact there is no such contradiction. The characters’ freedom we speak of here exists within the limits of the artistic design, and in that sense is just as much a created thing as is the unfreedom of the objectivized hero.<sup>10</sup>

Though the actual writing of the book only took Tondelli three months at the end of 1984, its preparatory project dates back a number of years. Despite its apparent freedom and openness, *Rimini* is therefore the product of a long premeditation. In a note dated 2 July 1979 Tondelli already envisaged the possibility of writing a novel based on a strong plot: ‘Ho bisogno di far trame, di raccontare, di scandire i rapporti tra i personaggi [...] Inizierei con un ambiente [...] cioè RIMINI, molto chiasso, molte luci’ (I, 1167).

The coexistence of all the novel’s different subplots—each one with its own protagonist who speaks with his or her peculiar voice—also implies the coexistence in the book of different styles and registers. Tondelli writes:

Stilisticamente il linguaggio del romanzo è formato nei toni e nei modi della letteratura violenta, patetica, sentimentale che mi sta più a cuore. Ci saranno pagine patetiche, altre “rosa”; ci saranno un paio di episodi di violenza piuttosto dettagliati [...] Non mancheranno le scene gioiosamente

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<sup>9</sup> This is the complete structure of the book: Parte prima: IN UN GIORNO DI PIOGGIA; *Pensione Kelly*; Parte seconda: RIMINI; *Hotel Kelly*; *APOCALISSE, ORA*.

<sup>10</sup> Bakhtin, p. 64.

comiche e divertenti, insomma vorrei fare un romanzo in cui gli stili si incrociano così come i sentimenti. (I, 1167).

The presence of these different stylistic registers turns out to be one of the most evident features in the book and one that deserves a further analysis.

1. **‘Letteratura violenta’**. Even though in *Rimini* there are no examples of a violence comparable to that described in some of the episodes of *Altri libertini*, some of the scenes in the book feature violent elements. The episode regarding the death of the writer Bruno May is one of these. Tondelli decides to keep it suspended for almost two chapters, in which he recounts in a long flashback the love story between Bruno and Aelred. At the end of the flashback we find Bruno alone and desperate and seeking his own destruction. Whilst wandering along the seafront he is approached by a familiar figure who hums the tune of *I Don’t Owe You Anything* by The Smiths, which evokes his affair with Aelred.

Verso le tre, quella stessa notte, Bruno uscì silenziosamente di casa. Camminò speditamente fino al mare, la testa china, come seguisse una direzione prestabilita. [...] Improvvisamente la ghiaia scricchiolò alle sue spalle. Bruno si arrestò. Sentì un rumore di passi che lo stavano raggiungendo. Cautamente si voltò. Scorse un’ombra. Una figura alta gli andava incontro [...] Bruno non si mosse. Cercò di individuare quella persona. Sentì gli arbusti scrocchiare e poi il fischio di una canzoncina [...] l’ombra gli si avvicinava. Bruno si inchiodò a terra. Conosceva molto bene quella canzone. [...] *Did I really walk all this way/Just to hear you say/“Oh, I don’t want to go out tonight”[...] I don’t owe you anything/But you owe me something/Repay me now...* [...] vide un ciuffo di capelli biondi. Alzò la mano come per accarezzarli. (I, 610-1).

L’ombra uscita dai giardinetti di fronte al Grand Hotel gli era di fronte. Smise di fischiettare quel motivo. “Aelred” disse Bruno avvicinando la mano [...] Un colpo violento lo prese alla bocca dello stomaco. Cadde in terra. Sentì altri colpi alle costole e sul cranio e una voce che lo offendeva. Perse i sensi. Quando si svegliò, si trovò spogliato della giacca e pieno di sangue sul volto e sulle mani. Si rialzò a fatica. [...] Barcollò fino a raggiungere la casa. Entrò nella sua stanza. Chiuse gli occhi. Quello che

seguì non fu altro che un dolore ridicolo e fulmineo. [...] Non disse un'ultima parola, né lasciò scritto niente. [...] (I, 651-2).

2. **'Letteratura patetica'**. The pathetic register is covered by Tondelli with the story of Beatrix Rheisberg who leaves Berlin and goes to Rimini to look for her sister Claudia. The character of Beatrix is vulnerable and sad. No longer in her prime, Tondelli describes her as 'né bella né brutta, alta, dai lunghi capelli neri e lisci che lasciava cadere sulle spalle strette e ossute' (I, 449). She leads a dull life as an antique dealer and is profoundly different from her younger and rebellious sister. Beatrix is at the centre of an all-female triangle formed by herself, Claudia and Hanna, an elderly maid who embodies the traditional values of femininity. While Hanna is maternal and protective, Beatrix fails to understand her sister who accuses her of being conformist and frigid. After the umpteenth row Claudia decides to leave.

Qualche giorno dopo, Claudia lasciò la casa. [...] dicendo ad Hanna che avrebbe telefonato in seguito per dare un recapito. In Leibnizstrasse le due donne attesero quella telefonata per oltre un mese. In certi momenti Hanna si avvicinava a Beatrix e la guardava interrogativa. Erano momenti che un estraneo non avrebbe riconosciuto tanto facevano parte di una comunicazione intima e consueta fra le due donne. Erano momenti che cadevano nel bel mezzo di una conversazione [...] quando improvvisamente Hanna si ripiegava in un mutismo assoluto e solo i suoi occhi ripetevano incessanti quella domanda; oppure quando Beatrix, rincasando, chiedeva chi avesse telefonato e Hanna scuoteva la testa e la guardava e le sue braccia abitate fin dalla fanciullezza a non conoscere mai un attimo di tregua o di riposo, tremavano per l'impazienza e l'impotenza, quasi volessero, a ogni costo, darsi da fare per cercare la piccola traditrice. Da quei giorni Beatrix cominciò a temere il silenzio che si creava fra lei e Hanna. [...] I piccoli occhi grigi di Hanna erano sempre più penetranti con lo sguardo del rimprovero e Beatrix avrebbe un giorno capitolato e fatto l'unica cosa che da tempo, ormai, da quando era morto suo padre, avrebbe voluto fare: gettarsi nel grembo di Hanna e piangere e accarezzare quelle grandi dita di contadina passandosele sulle guance e sentire la sua vicinanza e domandarle infine, senza parlare, i segni e i gesti

della sua protezione materna. E Hanna di certo non avrebbe risposto no alla sua bambina. (I, 461-3).

**3. Letteratura sentimentale.** The coexistence of all the characters in the book also implies the coexistence of many possible love stories. There are at least four of them in *Rimini*: a) Bruno May—Aelred; b) Marco Bauer—Susy; c) Beatrix Rheinsberg—Mario; d) Alberto—Milvia. Of these four love stories, the only one destined to end happily is that between Beatrix and Mario. The others, with varying degrees of drama, are all destined to finish on a sad, if not altogether tragic, note. The affair between Alberto and Milvia is the one characterized by the strongest note of sentimentality. Their relationship is founded on a lack of mutual knowledge that magnifies its emotional elements. The fact that Alberto and Milvia do not know much about each other makes it easier for them to fall in love. The absence of details about their lives also allows the writer to turn his two characters into two symbolic figures.

Le notti seguenti Alberto prese a tornare di corsa dal *Top In* per gettarsi in quell'amore clandestino e notturno che gli era entrato ormai nel sangue. Milvia lo attendeva insonne. Non appena sentiva emergere dall'oscurità silenziosa i passi di Alberto, usciva dalla stanza. Già sul pianerottolo iniziavano a baciarsi e i loro abbracci divennero sempre più placidi e distesi. Non ci fu bisogno di parole. Avanzavano il loro amore nel crescere dell'intimità e della consuetudine [...] Alberto guardava Milvia [...] quasi si trattasse di una creatura di sogno che ancora faticava a credere reale. E, dall'altra parte, la loro unione pareva effettivamente costruita della sostanza stessa dei sogni: l'intorpidimento di quelle ore a cavallo fra la notte e il nuovo giorno, la stanchezza, il fiato affannoso che Alberto aveva spremuto nel suo sax fin quasi a rimanerne soffocato; e che poi, miracolosamente, ritrovava nell'abbracciare Milvia. E lei, che a quella creatura della notte aveva affidato tutto il peso della sua insoddisfazione matrimoniale e della ricerca di una felicità, si vedeva [...] attorniata dalla notte dal silenzio, dalla sua voce [...] e quell'uomo di cui non sapeva assolutamente nulla le appariva avvolto dal mistero, un mistero in cui era

lentamente riuscita a penetrare fino a elevarsi, essa stessa, a fantastica creatura della notte. In questo modo i due amanti procedevano nei loro abbracci costruendosi reciprocamente una sorta di loro personalissima leggenda. E così facendo entravano nel mito: Alberto non era solo un uomo, ma tutti gli uomini di questa terra; e lei, Milvia, tutta la dolcezza recettiva e femminile di questo mondo. (I, 577-8).

4. **Letteratura comica.** The characters of the two down-and-out filmmakers Robby and Tony give Tondelli the chance to lighten his story and insert a comic diversion in the narrative. The comic potential of this part of the text is in the implausibility of the premise itself: the idea of financing a movie through donations from holidaymakers approached on the beach in Rimini. The clash of personalities between the two characters also triggers some comic situations. Whilst Tony is self-assured and deeply convinced of the success of his enterprise Robby plays the devil's advocate, trying to call the whole thing off.

Nei dettagli l'*Operazione Briciole* era [...] come scalare il cielo servendosi di piccozza, corda e ramponi, pensava Robby. L'idea di Tony era quella di setacciare la spiaggia adriatica [...] offrendo ai bagnanti la possibilità di diventare produttori cinematografici. Per questo aveva preparato tre differenti tipi di "sottoscrizioni": da dieci, da cinquanta e da centomila lire. In cambio offriva, a film terminato la divisione degli utili. [...] In caso di fallimento [...] si perdeva tutto. [...] Ma c'erano altre grane, come attraversare l'oceano su di un canotto, diceva Robby. E cioè che la massa di uomini necessaria a rastrellare il danaro si riduceva non a un battaglione, non a una compagnia, nemmeno a una pattuglia, ma semplicemente a due persone: lui e Tony. E questo era veramente incredibile. "Facciamo un po' di calcoli" disse Robby dopo aver ascoltato il piano strategico. Era certo di farlo desistere. [...] "Per raccogliere trecento milioni a forza di diecimila lire occorrerebbero trentamila pazzi scatenati disposti ad aprire il portafoglio. Con una media altamente ottimistica di cinquanta sottoscrizioni al giorno, venticinque per me e altrettante per te, ci servirebbero esattamente seicento giorni, due anni amico mio."

"Non hai calcolato le quote da centomila" disse Tony serafico. [...] "Hanno venduto la luna, hanno venduto il Colosseo centinaia di volte, stanno vendendo i pianeti le stelle, stanno spillando danaro promettendo



cremazioni nello spazio e funerali su Giove e tu ti preoccupi di vendere delle quote per formare una società? Mi deludi.” (I, 560-1).

These different registers can be easily isolated within the novel and can be regarded both as stylistic variations and as the writer’s attempt to reproduce on the page the various facets of his personality. Speaking of the book in 1984 Tondelli underlines the personal value of the novel:

vorrei fare un romanzo—e lo sto facendo—che mi assomigli: che sia tenero e disperato, violento e dolce, divertito e assorto, struggente e mistico. È l’unica autobiografia che qui mi permetto. (I, 1167).

At this stage of his career and life Tondelli seems to understand the mixing of literary registers and styles as a form of autobiographical self-projection thus confirming the impression that *Rimini* is a phase of passage for him. The writer seems to be growing up here in terms of scale of his projects—*Rimini* is a much more articulated project than *Altri libertini* and *Pao Pao*—but also in terms of his personal development and he appears to be indecisive as to which should be the predominant aspect of his personality. The idea of having written a sort of autobiography through *Rimini* still appears to be one of Tondelli’s main concerns a few years after publishing the book and whilst working on its French translation. In a letter with no date to Nicole Sels, his other French translator, we read:

A distanza di sei anni il mio giudizio è che *Rimini* sia un testo *difforme*: che abbia bellissime parti descrittive [...] e nella sua impostazione generale regga bene. Dall’altra parte ha delle debolezze evidenti: troppa autobiografia “sublimata”, un sottofondo patetico-sentimentale (non *melò* come in *Camere separate*) che non va assolutamente, brutti dialoghi all’americana. (I, 1184).

The writer's allusion to the 'brutti dialoghi all'americana' refers especially to the dialogues involving Marco Bauer whose words—constructed on the principle of efficiency—are characterized by a sharpness artificially modelled on American hardboiled crime fiction. The choice of an Americanized writing style—along with the use of generic aspects of 'Americanism' and American placenames—testifies to Tondelli's constant relations with American culture, either real or imagined. In *Rimini* the relation between Marco Bauer and Bruno May recalls that between Philip Marlowe and Terry Lennox in Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953). The connection between *Rimini* and Chandler's works will be further analyzed in the next section of this chapter, but it is worth comparing here two pairs of short dialogues that feature similar episodes. The first one is a parallel to an emergency situation: in Tondelli's book Bruno is stranded in Cervia and calls Marco in the middle of the night to ask him to go and pick him up. In Chandler's passage Marlowe finds Terry Lennox in an alcoholic haze and wandering alone on Hollywood Boulevard and bails him out before he gets arrested.

Chiamò quella stessa notte alle due. [...]  
 "Pronto!" urlai nella cornetta.  
 "Non stavi dormendo, vero?"  
 [...]  
 "No... non stavo dormendo. Che ti succede?"  
 "Devi assolutamente vedere un posto."  
 [...]  
 "Facciamo domani?"  
 "Ti sto telefonando ora. Devi vederlo ora. È importante."  
 "Dove sei?"  
 "A Cervia."  
 [...] "E hai bisogno di qualcuno che ti riporti a casa?"  
 "... Più o meno." (I, 557).

‘Straighten up and walk,’ I said, putting on the tough. I winked at him from the side. ‘Can you make it? Are you stinko?’  
 He looked me over vaguely and then smiled his little one-sided smile. ‘I have been,’ he breathed. ‘Right now I guess I’m just a little—empty.’  
 ‘Okay, but make with the feet. You’re half-way into the drunk tank already.’<sup>11</sup>

In the second pair of dialogues we have Marco Bauer and Philip Marlowe dealing respectively with Susy and Vivian, the women with whom they have volatile affairs. In both cases, the men fail to fulfil the women’s expectations in terms of commitment and availability.

“Non mi va che mi tratti così, soprattutto al giornale” disse, quando fummo soli in macchina.  
 “Preferisci che ti chiami ‘amore’ oppure ‘cara’ e ti dica: ‘per favore, gattina, potresti andare per caso in quel tal posto sempre che tu passi anche di là per comprarti le sigarette?’ Vuoi che dica questo?”  
 “Sei il solito imbecille” grugnì.  
 “Vuoi che tutti sappiano che te la fai con me? Non hai che da dirlo. [...]”  
 “Sei un gran figlio di puttana.”  
 “È una vita che me lo sento dire... Va bene la strada?”  
 “Svolta al prossimo semaforo” disse. “E poi non ti capisco proprio. È come se tu fossi realmente due persone diverse. Una quando sei solo con me, e un’altra sul lavoro.”  
 “Tu invece sei sempre la solita micetta arrapante.” Spinsi una mano fra le sue gambe.  
 “Vaffanculo!” sbraitò, togliendola. (I, 670-1).

I kept on kissing her. After a long time she pulled her head away [...]  
 ‘What has Eddie Mars got on you?’  
 Her body stiffened in my arms and her breath made a harsh sound. [...]  
 ‘So that’s the way it is,’ she said in a soft dull voice.  
 ‘That’s the way it is. Kissing is nice, but your father didn’t hire me to sleep with you.’  
 ‘You son of a bitch,’ she said calmly without moving.  
 I laughed in her face. ‘Don’t think I’m an icicle,’ I said. ‘I’m not blind or without senses. I have warm blood like the next guy. You’re easy to take—too damned easy. What has Eddie Mars got on you?’  
 ‘If you say that again, I’ll scream.’

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<sup>11</sup> Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* [1953], London, Penguin, 1959, p. 10.

‘Go ahead and scream.’

She jerked away and pulled herself upright, far back in the corner of the car.<sup>12</sup>

Tondelli’s rejection of these Americanized dialogues echoes—and turns upside down—the words written by Elio Vittorini in an article published in the *American Quarterly* in 1949. In Vittorini’s article the move towards dialogues modelled on those found in American writers—characterized by that sharpness and effectiveness that seem to bother Tondelli in his letter to Nicole Sels—is coveted as a necessary step towards the renovation of Italian literature.

So oratorical, so essayistic, so intellectual though modern, was the language in which the best writers wrote that a line of dialogue, for instance, would find a place therein only if precious in itself [...] and would be buried in an argumentation that served as a comment on it. One didn’t write ‘he said’ or ‘she said’, but something like this: ‘In a long whispering that seemed like the cheek of a cloud come from the farthest horizons of their infancy, he enveloped her in the following words...’ [...] Something quite different was needed by our young writers [...] They were intent [...] on making the culture-laden language of the *Solariani* more immediate. They took care at the same time not to fall into journalese or sketchiness and [...] began to translate and publish the short stories and novels of contemporary Americans [...] [these] translations constituted a decisive factor in the Italian literary revolution in the years between 1930 and 1940. In them was finally found the authorisation to write ‘he said’ or ‘she said’, as, once upon a time, the fourteenth century author of the *Novellino* had written and as Boccaccio had written—and it was a *modern* authorisation.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the two most important registers in the book are the one related to the sub-plot involving the writer Bruno May and the one connected to the journalist Marco Bauer. In the former case, we have a decidedly pathetic and

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* [1939], London, Penguin, 1970, p. 147.

<sup>13</sup> Elio Vittorini, ‘American Influences on Contemporary Italian Literature’, *American Quarterly*, vol. 1 (1949), pp. 3-8 (pp. 5-6).

melodramatic tone. The story of the young and talented writer, tormented by an unhappy love for an English painter who will eventually become his torturer, has some interesting elements. First of all, in the character of Bruno May—also the author's most likely alter ego in the novel—it is easy to trace some features of the future protagonist of *Camere separate*: Leo. There are also, well disguised under the fictionalized events of the novel, some common traits with Tondelli himself.<sup>14</sup> Bruno is a wretched man, a loser, but he is also central in the economy of the book especially for his relation with Marco Bauer, the young and ambitious journalist apparently sent to Rimini to edit the summer supplement of his newspaper. With Marco Bauer, Bruno May shares a sort of specularity, starting from their initials and including their attitudes towards life; which are, indeed, opposite, but in both cases centred on a 'sfrenata corsa al successo, all'assoluto [...] uno nella carriera, l'altro nell'arte o in Dio' (II, 949). Bruno May recalls the figure of Roger Wade, the alcoholic and broken writer in Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953).

#### Chandler and 'Rimini'

There are explicit intertextual connections between *Rimini* and the work of the American noir writer, as Tondelli himself acknowledges in various articles and interviews. During an interview with Angelo Mainardi (1985) we read:

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<sup>14</sup> Some interesting analogies between the two: they are more or less the same age and are outsiders in the shortlist of a literary prize based on the Adriatic coast (Tondelli for the Riccione-Ater competition, Bruno for the Riviera prize). During their stay in London, they go to the same cinema, the Ritz in Brixton, for the screening of a film called *Tibet, a Buddhist Trilogy*. Finally, they both manage to finish one of their books (*Rimini* in Tondelli's case) thanks to the help of a mysterious patron.

AM: 'La figura del giornalista-detective che fa il grande "scoop", anche se alla fine questo gli si volatilizza nelle mani, sa di stereotipo hollywoodiano perfino nei suoi atteggiamenti, nel suo linguaggio. L'abbiamo visto spesso, al cinema [...] Per quest'aspetto il tuo libro ricorda [...] Chandler [...] Sei d'accordo?'

PVT: 'Sono d'accordo che la figura del giornalista è la parte più chandleriana del libro. Lo stesso incontro tra il giornalista e lo scrittore, con la storia delle bevute, ricorda episodi di Philip Marlowe. Erano appunto queste intuizioni stilistiche che volevo raccontare in *Rimini*.' (II, 953).

Again, in a 1989 article, he writes:

mi divertivo molto a leggere [...] romanzi gialli, di spionaggio, racconti neri [...] Fra gli americani naturalmente il mio grande mito fu Raymond Chandler, ottimo scrittore, ottimo giallista, con tutti quei finali a scatole cinesi, soprattutto nel suo capolavoro *Il lungo addio*. (II, 914).

The character of Roger Wade develops in Chandler's novel a relation with Philip Marlowe similar to that between Bruno May and Marco Bauer; it would therefore be possible to reconstruct a sort of parallelism among these four characters: May has character traits in common with Wade and he develops an intricate form of friendship and affection with Bauer whose characteristics seem to be those of Marlowe. This sort of mirror-game is increasingly complicated by the more general relationship between writer and character that can usually be traced in a novel. In *The Long Goodbye*, Chandler identifies himself both with Philip Marlowe—his ideal self, cynical and disillusioned—and with Roger Wade—the writer in crisis, the alcoholic. In Tondelli's case, we could work out something rather similar. We have already mentioned the analogies between Tondelli and Bruno May; in the case of Marco Bauer, the similarities are subtler. The writer, quite clearly, does not like the arrogant and stubborn path through life cut by

Marco and at first he makes him plainly detestable. But, with the unfolding of the novel, and while we gradually discover that Marco is nothing more than a naïve piece in a game bigger than him, Tondelli gives us the chance to shift our point of view: in a way, Marco Bauer and his author are opposite, but complementary, their relation resembling that between Marco and Bruno May. In their difference, even in their opposition, we discover a certain degree of similarity.

On the whole, *Rimini* is a novel about deception: deception between people, deception or confusion between imagination and reality and, finally, deception of the inner self. The act of deceiving or of being deceived is central in noir literature and particularly in Chandler's books which are always constructed on a sort of double plot. The outer plot is loosely associated with corruption and crime on a large scale: the world in his novels consists of huge enterprises—the press, the law, the courts, the police, the criminals—so intertwined that they seem to form a monolith in which good and evil are indistinguishable. This outer, deceptive reality is represented in *Rimini* by the alleged suicide of a politician that hides a far more complicated set of schemes. The inner plot is instead more personalized and based on a sort of original sin which could be, indifferently, the disillusionment of Philip Marlowe or the hubris of Marco Bauer. Only when they are able to look beyond their self-constructed veils can reality be seen for what it really is: falsity and betrayal. There are several interesting contact points between the characters of Marco Bauer and Philip Marlowe: first of all, they both have a distinctively masculine and single lifestyle, they are inveterate chain-smokers and drink a lot. Drinking in particular seems to become, in the case of Marco Bauer, a

voluntary homage to Chandler. At the beginning of the book we have a very Chandlerian description of a small cocktail bar:

Certi momenti, certe vittorie, le puoi solamente festeggiare con il tuo barman di fiducia. Quando entrai nel piccolo cocktail-bar erano da poco passate le sei. Il fumo stagnava nel piccolo locale nonostante un grande ventilatore a pale si desse languidamente da fare per smaltirlo. (I, 411).

The stagnant smoke in the small room, the slow motion of the fan's blades are all part of the stereotypes of the noir novel; even more significant, however, is the predilection that Marco develops for a drink called 'the long goodbye'. It is Bruno May who teaches him how to make it:

"Se vuole glielo insegno [...] Allora: ¾ di birra rossa, ¼ di gin, una fetta di limone. Si ricordi: solo *pale ale* inglesi e rosse tedesche. Buone anche quelle di grano. Niente francesi. Criticabili quelle olandesi. Ho provato anche con la birra giapponese. Non è male, sa?"  
 "Come si chiama?"  
 "Il Lungo Addio [...] E' una bevanda così sentimentale. Non trova?". (I, 504).

This episode has at least two overt connections with Chandler's novel: the fact that Tondelli's link between Bruno May/Roger Wade and Marco Bauer/Philip Marlowe starts from a drink called 'the long goodbye' and the parallel with Marlowe's meeting in a cocktail bar with Terry Lennox, another alter ego of the writer and another heavy drinker, who is punctilious about the correct recipe for a gimlet.

We sat in a corner of the bar at Victor's and drank gimlets. 'They don't know how to make them here,' he said. 'What they call a gimlet is just some lime or lemon juice and gin with a dash of sugar and bitters. A real



gimlet is half gin and half Rose's Lime Juice and nothing else. It beats martinis hollow.<sup>15</sup>

Natasha Spender, a close friend of Chandler's during his last years, wrote that there were three distinct self-portraits of Chandler in *The Long Goodbye*:

Like Terry Lennox, Raymond was a young ex-soldier in the early twenties, battle-scarred and scared, whose pride was that 'of a man who has nothing else' [...] Like that of Roger Wade, the successful, middle-aged, alcoholic and egocentric writer, Raymond's drunken stream of consciousness could also at bad moments be full of self-hatred, writer's angst and sarcastic hostility [...] Marlowe, of course, represents Chandler's ideal-self, the conscience which punished the Roger Wade within him though not without commendation for achievement (for Wade in the book is "a bit of a bastard and maybe a bit of a genius too"), and befriended the Terry Lennox within, not without censure [...] All three characters were drinkers, like Raymond himself, two of them disintegrating and despairing, for only the ideal-self Marlowe shows a disposition towards integrity [...] Roger Wade [was] his bad self, Philip Marlowe his 'good self' and Terry Lennox his anxious one.<sup>16</sup>

The symbolic importance attributed by Tondelli to the 'long goodbye' is underlined again after Bruno's suicide when for Marco having one of these drinks seems the best way to say farewell to the writer's fragile existence: 'Avevo solo voglia di sferrare qualche pugno. Trascorsi solo tutta la serata, sul letto, a sbronzarmi. Mi preparai un Long-Goodbye e fu il mio saluto' (I, 667).

Even though Marco Bauer is not a detective or a private eye, as a journalist he has, or at least should have, a 'camera eye', that capacity, which Philip Marlowe also has, of looking at reality as through camera lenses registering every

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<sup>15</sup> *The Long Goodbye*, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Natasha Spender, 'His Own Long Goodbye', in *The World of Raymond Chandler*, ed. by Miriam Gross, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977, pp. 127-58 (pp. 134-5).

single detail. According to Peter Humm,<sup>17</sup> the idea of the ‘camera eye’, as used by Chandler, is connected to the classic statement of the writer as witness made by Christopher Isherwood—another writer who was an influence on Tondelli’s works—in the opening lines of *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939):

I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.<sup>18</sup>

In this camera-stare there can be a sort of unnerving blankness. Marco Bauer appears to be the perfect paradigm of the camera eye: he has a penchant for descriptions (‘Mi bastano le notizie. Non voglio i commenti’; I, 430), for short sentences, full of details, but empty of comment. In his way of looking at reality there is no difference between the banal and the significant and this lack of discrimination induces him to ignore some important elements. He is a ‘quite passive’ camera: he records, but does not consider, at least until the end of the book, when he moves to a ‘printing’ position and finally (but nonetheless too late) understands what has been going on around him. A significant example of the lack of discernment suffered by Marco Bauer is represented by the picture on the wall of his bedroom. It shows two elderly people waving at the entrance of Italia in Miniatura and haunts Bauer with its meaning throughout the book. Only at the end of the story, when the conspiracy has been discovered, along with his naivety and subsequent failure, does Marco understand the true meaning of the photograph:

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Humm, ‘Camera Eye/Private Eye’, in *American Crime Fiction: Studies in the Genre*, ed. by Brian Docherty, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 23-38.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* [1939], London, Penguin, 1969, p. 7.

Johnny [...] l'aveva spacciata per la foto d'apertura di quel parco di divertimenti. In realtà l'Italia in miniatura stava chiudendo i battenti [...] i saluti da Rimini che si leggevano sulla borsa [...] non erano saluti di benvenuto, ma di arrivederci. Mi aveva ingannato molto bene. Tutti mi avevano ingannato [...] Ora anche Bauer chiudeva i battenti. (I, 721).

In spite of these similarities, there are at least two main differences between Marco Bauer and Philip Marlowe that are worth underlining. The first is a difference of approach. Chandler's private eye is characterized by a sort of chivalric attitude: he is the embodiment of the modern knight errant.<sup>19</sup> This motif is already clear in *The Big Sleep* (1939) where the private eye makes his debut. The image of the knight is Marlowe's cross and affliction: the knight is the historic antecedent of the detective, but Marlowe's irony would suggest that his code is hopelessly anachronistic in the modern world. There are at least two passages in the book worth reading from this point of view. The first is at the very beginning, when Marlowe finds himself for the first time in the main hallway of Sternwood Place, 'which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants'. Over the entrance doors

There was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair. The knight has pushed the visor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to underline the genesis of Philip Marlowe's character. Originally called Mallory, he is a coded version of Sir Thomas Malory, author of the poem of chivalry *Le Morte Darthur* (1485).

<sup>20</sup> *The Big Sleep*, p. 9.

As William Marling writes:

Irony as he may be, Marlowe is no less than a knight: it is his awareness of his code that nourishes this irony. The passage sets up the figure of the detective/knight, his problem with naked and/or amorous daughters to whom he must be sociable, and the solution: a pragmatic stepping into the idealised tableau to achieve results. The chivalric figure fiddles with knots; the modern detective unties people.<sup>21</sup>

The second passage is set in Marlowe's flat, where, waiting for him on the chessboard, there is a problem to be solved:

I went over [...] to the chessboard on a card table under the lamp. There was a problem laid out on the board, a six-mover. I couldn't solve it, like a lot of my problems. I reached down and moved a knight, then pulled my hat and coat off and threw them somewhere [...] I looked down at the chessboard. The move with the knight was wrong. I put it back where I had moved it from. Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights.<sup>22</sup>

Here, the knight on the chessboard and the real life one—Marlowe himself—have no chance of succeeding or solving the problems that they are obliged to face. If Marlowe, though often bound for failure, at least attempts to help people, Marco Bauer does not even try. Bauer is a non-knight, he does not have a code to stick to, except his own, based on ambition and egotism. When he finds himself in the position of helping Bruno May out of his deep depression, he declines without regret:

“Lei è stato l'ultimo a cui Bruno ha chiesto aiuto, lo sa?”  
Mi sentii a disagio. Ero più che imbarazzato. Tossii.

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<sup>21</sup> William Marling, *Raymond Chandler*, Boston, Twayne, 1986, p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> *The Big Sleep*, pp. 150-3.

“Ripeto a lei ciò che gli dissi quella notte. Non era il mio tipo. E questo vale per tutto. Addio”. (I, 667).

He is not ironic at all and his general attitude will be, ultimately, the reason for his miserable failure.

The other meaningful difference between the two characters is in their approach to sex and to women in general. Whilst Philip Marlowe seems to be bothered by sexuality and is ill at ease both with women and homosexuals, Marco Bauer is an oversexed character. This difference in attitude is again connected to the basic chivalric or non-chivalric nature of the two characters. In Marlowe's case the resistance to sexual temptation originates in the chivalric tradition of courtly love, in which the chaste woman can only be worshipped from afar by the knight anguished by the torments of love. Marco Bauer, not at all bothered by torments and anguish, does not have any resistance whatsoever towards sex. This is another feature of his basic foolishness: he is so engrossed in his role of womanizer that he does not even realize Susanna's double-cross. The presence of the villain, or at least of one of them, in the form of a sexy woman very close to the hero, is another characteristic element of the noir novel. In *The Big Sleep*, Vivian Regan is modelled on Vivian, the mistress of Merlin the Enchanter in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. She is beautiful, black-haired, intriguing, but, like her namesake, a liar: the description of her in the book is similar to that of Susy in Tondelli's *Rimini*:

She was worth a stare [...] I stared at her legs in the sheerest silk stockings [...] They were visible to the knee and one of them well beyond [...] The calves were beautiful, the ankles long and slim [...] Her head was against

an ivory satin cushion. Her hair was black and parted in the middle and she had the hot black eyes of the portrait in the hall.<sup>23</sup>

Mi voltai [...] Era la principessa e che razza di principessa. Aveva capelli neri, occhi neri, pelle abbronzata, un paio di gambe affusolate inguantate in calze trasparenti, nere, scarpe col tacco alto anch'esse nere. E una camicetta senza maniche di seta bianca. (I, 425).

It is interesting to notice the same visual contrast between the blackness of the two women's features and the whiteness of the surrounding scenes: Vivian's room is fitted with ivory furniture and drapes and a white carpet, while Susanna makes her entrance in the open, sunny and anonymous space of the newspaper's editorial office.

The use of urban space is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Chandler's fiction. The city, Los Angeles, is carefully described and remains one of the most powerful forces at work in his books whose essence is in the end the dynamic conflict between the individual—the private eye—and the city itself considered as the reification of all the worst fears. The enemy is not really in other individuals but rather in the urban jungle, which is the embodiment of all the threats suffered by the self. The protagonist in Tondelli's novel has to face a similar reality: both Marco Bauer and Philip Marlowe have to confront a world which is always shifting, they have to keep up with the action, but also make what sense of reality they can. This strong sense of displacement and continuous change of setting is central in these novels. It comes mainly from the fact that all the settings, even the new ones, are already well known in their daytime features, they are familiar and harmless, but, as soon as darkness falls, they become

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

unknown in their 'propaggini meno accessibili'. Rimini and Los Angeles are 'no-towns' thrown in the middle of a borderless world. In a short essay on Chandler, first published in the *Southern Review* in 1970, Fredric Jameson asserts that Chandler's Los Angeles is a microcosm of the country as a whole, a centre-less city

in which the various classes have lost touch with each other because each is isolated in his own geographical compartment. If the symbol of social coherence and comprehensibility was furnished by the nineteenth-century Parisian apartment house [...] with its shop on the ground floor, its wealthy inhabitants on the second and third, petty bourgeoisie further up, and workers' rooms on top along with the maids and servants, then Los Angeles is the opposite, a spreading out horizontally, a flowing apart of the elements of the social structure. Since there is no longer any privileged experience in which the whole of the social structure can be grasped, a figure must be invented who can be superimposed on the society as a whole, whose routine and life pattern serve somehow to tie its separate and isolated parts together.<sup>24</sup>

This necessary figure is the detective: through him we are enabled to see society as a whole. His role of connector of isolated areas is a heritage of his origins as a policeman. The birth of a professional police force is in fact related to the modern state's will not so much to prevent crime as to know—and therefore control—the different elements of its administrative area. In this sense, the private eye takes the place of a government functionary. Furthermore, as an explorer of the society, the detective visits either those places we do not look at or those we cannot look at. The secretive, the criminal, the anonymous—these are his areas of action. The journalist, as in the case of Marco Bauer, is in a similar position: he is a connector by nature since the main purpose of his job is to know and thus understand—and

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<sup>24</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'On Raymond Chandler', in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. by Glenn W. Most and William W. Stove, New York, Harcourt, 1983, pp. 122-48 (p. 127).

gain some control over—reality. He constantly shifts in urban space and explores unknown and borderline territories. With him we can take a look beyond our usual horizon. Both the detective and the journalist are on their personal quest, a quest which usually ends up in a meaningful place, a sort of magnet that attracts and repels the individual. In *The Big Sleep* this role is reserved to the Fulwider Building, while in *Rimini* it is the Silthea building site. They are momentous places because of what happens in relation to or in them (a murder in the Fulwider building and a whole conspiracy around the building site) and ultimately have the same effect of repulsion on whoever is investigating around them: both Philip Marlowe and Marco Bauer have eventually to back off from the site and from the whole city, at least for a while.

#### *Hyper-Reality on the Adriatic Coast*

The way in which Tondelli portrays Rimini has a very strong postmodern appeal. The city is already a set: as one of the characters remarks, it is a form of reality turned into a show, completely artificial and modelled on American cities with prominent entertainment industries such as Los Angeles (in particular, Hollywood) and Nashville. Ephemeral is the key word of the book. Rimini seems to be built on a considerable insubstantiality. We could compare it to those westerns filmed just outside Rome, where the buildings are made of painted wood and only provided with a single, but nonetheless essential, element: the façade. Based on the principle that ‘seeing is believing’ and that it is always possible to make other people believe what we want them to, Rimini is a massive lie:



“Il fatto curioso” proseguì Carlo, “è che molti snobbano la nostra riviera [...] Dici Rimini o Riccione e subito quelli pensano alla pensioncina, alla piadina e alla mazurka sull’aia. E dicono Rimini per carità, l’Adriatico, via! Poi li porti qui un week-end e non si toglierebbero mai più [...] Disposti a tutto, pur di consumare qui qualche notte.”

Il discorso mi interessava [...] “Fa l’albergatore?” domandai.

“Oh, no. Ho la direzione di un paio di boutiques qui in viale Ceccarini. Non ha idea di quanto vendano i nostri negozi durante la stagione. Le collezioni invernali più costose spariscono in quattro-cinque giorni. E i clienti non sono mica miliardari, sa? Persone normali, gente che non vuol far sapere in giro che stacca assegni da venti milioni alla volta soltanto per il guardaroba. Arrivano dalle città di provincia, dalla Lombardia, dall’Emilia, dal Veneto e assaltano le collezioni. Poi spariscono. Sembrano tutti americani.”

“Ma non è la stessa cosa. Questo non è il Sunset Boulevard o la Quinta Strada.”

“Certo” disse serafica Susy, “l’importante è farlo però credere. E crederci.”

(I, 442-443).

This simulation is carefully constructed, Rimini must seem—or rather must become in the eyes of the watchers—Hollywood or Nashville. The *mise en scène* must deceive even those who have created it. The most interesting achievement in *Rimini*, which is in this sense a true postmodern novel, is precisely this assimilation: Rimini becomes a form of hyper-reality, the sort of hyper-reality mentioned by Jean Baudrillard in his *Amérique* (1986).

Between Baudrillard’s American diaries and Tondelli’s novel there are some interesting analogies. First of all, the sexual motive: in another part of the passage quoted above, Carlo mentions ‘l’industria del sesso’ as the city’s main source of income. The sex trade is obviously related to the life conducted by the tourists on Rimini’s beaches and Baudrillard, in the chapter entitled *L’Amérique sidérale*, underlines the same link between sex and beach:

Sexe et plage [...] Quelques concepts. Sexe et concepts. *Just a life*. Tout est repris par la simulation. Les paysages par la photographie, les femmes par le scénario sexuel, les pensées par l'écriture [...] On peut se demander si le monde lui-même n'existe qu'en fonction de la publicité qui peut en être faite dans un autre monde.<sup>25</sup>

Sex, beach and simulation are, significantly, the three cardinal points of the cover design of one of the editions of *Rimini*: a smiling girl, in a seaside setting, with a pair of mirror-shades that reflect and double—and therefore counterfeit—the surrounding reality. In this sense, Rimini is neither dream nor reality, but is precisely a hyper-reality because—as Baudrillard writes of America, but the same words seem perfectly to epitomize the case of Rimini too—‘c’est une utopie qui dès le début s’est vécue comme réalisée. Tout ici est réel, pragmatique, et tout vous laisse rêveur’.<sup>26</sup>

The summer life on the Riviera is organized in the most pragmatic way, boredom is banned, having fun becomes a sort of moral imperative, the urge for excitement gradually but inevitably develops into a kind of religious trance:

Mi immisi nel traffico lento del lungomare. Grandi fari illuminavano il retro degli stabilimenti balneari. La sequenza ordinata delle cabine [...] aveva in sé qualcosa di metafisico e infantile nello stesso tempo: come si trattasse di un paesaggio costruito per i giochi dei bambini—le casette, i tettucci, i lettini, gli oblò, le finestrelle, le tinte tenui [...] Dalla parte opposta stavano gli alberghi [...] Arrivai a una rotonda immersa nella luce e parcheggiai. Lì sfociava un grande viale pieno di luci, insegne al neon, tavolini dalle tovagliette bianche affacciati sul passeggio, biciclette, stormi di turisti che procedevano lentamente [...] Mi immersi nel flusso della passeggiata. Alzai gli occhi, ma non mi fu possibile scorgere l'altezza dei palazzi. Ma erano veramente palazzi di cento piani come si era indotti a credere abbagliati da tutte quelle luci sospese a mezz'aria o non invece dei semplici condomini? L'illusione era perfetta. Non avevo mai visto nulla di simile in Italia. Ovunque suoni, musiche, luci, insegne sofisticatissime che si accendevano e spegnevano seguendo un ritmo preciso; disegni

<sup>25</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique*, Paris, Grasset et Fasquelle, 1986, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 57.

elettronici che si svolgevano su pannelli grandi come schermi cinematografici procedevano da destra a sinistra e poi da sinistra a destra e poi trasversalmente e dall'alto in basso e viceversa controllati, nella immensa varietà di combinazioni, da un computer: scritte, slogan, figurazioni grafiche, labbra che sorridevano spargendo bollicine frizzanti, che succhiavano cannucce, gelati, bibite. (I, 438-439).

The passage is rich in remarkable allusions. Firstly, it is worth underlining the dehumanized aspect of the Riviera's nightlife. Tondelli lingers over several groups of people (the waiters, the gay men, the girls, the common tourists, etc), but never on individuals: there is no place for individuality in this slowly proceeding procession. In this sense, the role of computers seems to be central in the organization of this kind of life. The view we have here is a *Blade Runner*-like one: buildings a hundred storeys high (or so they seem to be), neon signs everywhere and people who behave like robots. Secondly, there is the childish aspect of this 'divertimentificio', which is underlined by Tondelli also in another passage of the book, where he describes the daily closing ritual of Fiabilandia, a theme park full of interesting implications:

Le torri di Fiabilandia sveltavano color rosa salmone nella notte illuminate da grandi fari rendendosi visibili fin dalla provinciale. Alcuni altoparlanti diffondevano all'esterno una musica di flauti come per sedurre il pubblico a entrare nel giardino delle fiabe [...] Mezzanotte suonò alle torri del castello di Cenerentola. A uno a uno i grandi fari che illuminavano il parco si spensero. Ci fu un gran silenzio. Fuori dal muro di cinta la gente guardava in alto appoggiata alla capote della propria automobile. All'ultimo tocco tutto si spense, poi, d'improvviso, partirono razzi dalla coda fluorescente che solcarono il cielo fino a scoppiare e illuminare l'intero parco di una luce gelida e spettrale. Altri fuochi partirono in sequenza. Alla fine, in un lampo colorato, si illuminò una grande scritta che diceva: ARRIVEDERCI. Le luci poi si spensero nel buio della notte. La giornata di Fiabilandia anche quel giorno era finita. La gente applaudì. (I, 653-655).

Fiabilandia has in *Rimini* the same function that Baudrillard assigns in *Amérique* to Disneyland. Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make the people believe that the rest of the country is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong instead to the hyper-real dimension of simulation.<sup>27</sup> The role of Fiabilandia in relation to the city of Rimini is identical. Rimini is really a massive lie, a huge simulation of reality, it is hyper-reality, but, in order to maintain even a feeble connection to objectivity, it must necessarily have an absolutely fake counterpart, something artificial and recognized as such. What is more artificial than a theme park, with its spaceships, roller-coasters, castles and pirates' islands? In a theme park, reality is frozen and memory is controlled and mapped through the presence of photo-points, the only places officially devoted to the creation of recollections. Objectivity is reduced to the size of a miniature and grown ups can regress to childhood and live in the cosy belief that adults are elsewhere in the 'real' world, along with worries and troubles. What they are unable to understand is that true childishness is everywhere and a 'real-reality' no longer exists. This 'simulation of the third order' works as the ideological basis of Tondelli's novel, which might take as its own epigraph the warning placed by Jean Baudrillard at the beginning of *Amérique*:

CAUTION: OBJECTS IN THIS MIRROR MAY BE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR!

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<sup>27</sup> For the discourse on 'simulation' see also Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacre et simulations*, Paris, Galilée, 1981.

*Rimini* marks a substantial step forward towards the achievements of Tondelli's last novel, *Camere separate*, discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

**A Single Man:**  
*Biglietti agli amici and Camere separate*

Schließlich brauchen sie uns nicht mehr, die Frühentrückten,  
 man entwöhnt sich des Irdischen sanft, wie man den Brüsten  
 milde der Mutter entwächst. Aber wir, die so große  
 Geheimnisse brauchen, denen aus Trauer so oft  
 seliger Fortschritt entspringt –: *könnten* wir sein ohne sie?  
 (Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duineser Elegien, Die Erste Elegie*,  
 1923, 86-89)<sup>1</sup>

*The Angelic Architecture of 'Biglietti agli Amici'*

Immediately after the publication of *Rimini* and while he was still working on the first nucleus of *Camere separate*, Tondelli published a peculiar and very intimate book entitled *Biglietti agli amici* (1986). The first edition was produced by a small publishing company in Bologna, Baskerville, and consisted of only twenty-four copies, to be given to twenty-four friends as a Christmas present. The second impression comprised five hundred copies and was properly distributed in bookshops. A third edition was published by Bompiani in 1997. The book was structured into two equal parts (respectively called *Notte* and *Giorno*) and each part was marked by the passing of time. We therefore have twelve cards for the twelve daytime hours and twelve cards for night-time. In the first edition, each page included the full name of one of Tondelli's friends, whilst the later versions only had their initials. Tondelli's project was to realize a *livre d'art*, a personal

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<sup>1</sup> 'They've finally no more need of us, the early-departed, one's gently weaned from terrestrial things as one mildly outgrows the breasts of a mother. But we, that have need of such mighty secrets, we, for whom sorrow's so often source of blessedest progress, could we exist without them?' (*Duino Elegies*, trans. and ed. by J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender, London, Chatto and Windus, 1977, p. 31).

and precious book initially destined to remain within a private sphere. Its deliberate 'uselessness' immediately endows the project with a strong postmodern appeal. The book is constructed out of a series of short messages that are either quotations from Tondelli's favourite books or extracts from his own works and it has a dense intertextual structure. Alessandro Zaccuri, in his review of *Biglietti agli amici*, underlines how often 'il biglietto si esaurisce nella citazione, secondo un procedimento di reimpiego combinatorio caratteristico dell'estetica postmoderna.'<sup>2</sup> In the 'Nota dell'autore' in the Bompiani edition Tondelli writes:

I testi qui raccolti sotto forma di biglietti contengono o inglobano citazioni e riscritture da: *Il Trentesimo Anno* di Ingeborg Bachmann; *Big World* di Joe Jackson; *Songs of Love and Hate* di Leonard Cohen; *Tao Te Ching*; *The Father Brown's Stories* di Gilbert K. Chesterton; *The Queen is Dead* degli Smiths; *Servitude et Grandeur Militaires* di Alfred de Vigny. [...] I biglietti stampati in corsivo appartengono alle pagine del diario letterario degli anni 1982-1983. (I, 1207).

The quotations were accompanied by

tavole angeliche e astrologiche [...] ricavate da Barrett, *The Magus* riportato in Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels*, The Free Press, New York, alla pagina 344: *The Angels of the Hours of the Day and Night*. (I, 1207).

Tondelli translates part of Leonard Cohen's *Famous Blue Raincoat* (card to L.E., *Sesta ora della notte. Biglietto numero 6*) and quotes The Smiths' *I Know It's Over* (card to S.Z., *Quarta ora del giorno. Biglietto numero 16*) and Alfred de Vigny (card to G.D.S., *Settima ora del giorno. Biglietto numero 19*), but the most

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<sup>2</sup> Alessandro Zaccuri, 'Sono postmoderni i biglietti di Tondelli', *L'Avvenire*, 3 May 1997, p. 15.

relevant presence in the book is that of Ingeborg Bachmann and her collection of stories devoted to the 'thirtieth year'. Bachmann's visibility in the cards of *Biglietti agli amici* is a first sign of her future relevance in *Camere separate*. The card to F.W. (*Seconda ora della notte. Biglietto numero 2*) closes on the following note: 'Mentre scrive queste note, sulle prime pagine del libro di Bachmann, il sole è rispuntato a Boulogne.' (I, 817). The card to N.S. (*Sesta ora del giorno. Biglietto numero 18*) opens on a quotation from Bachmann's book: 'Sulla fine del viaggio taceva. Non avrebbe voluto finirlo, alla fine avrebbe voluto scomparire, senza lasciare traccia, diventando introvabile.' (I, 883).

The presence of fragments from *Das dreissigste Jahr* (1961) marks the beginning of a path that will bring Tondelli—through the constant pondering over the theme of separation and the practice of a new 'poetica del frammento'—to his final novel in 1989. The gap between *Biglietti agli amici* and *Camere separate* was bridged by the publication of some short stories that are variations on the same themes. Of these, *My sweet car* seems to be particularly resonant from this point of view. Published in the review *Cinema & Cinema* (no. 48, March 1987) and originating as a script for a short movie, *My sweet car* incorporates four extracts from the 1963 Feltrinelli edition of Bachmann's book:

1. Quando si avvicina al suo trentesimo anno e sopraggiunge l'inverno, quando una parentesi di ghiaccio attanaglia novembre e dicembre e il suo cuore gela, si addormenta sulle sue pene. (I, 766);
2. Quando un uomo si avvicina al suo trentesimo anno di età, nessuno smette di dire che è giovane. Ma lui, per quanto non riesca a scoprire in se stesso alcun cambiamento, diventa insicuro, ha l'impressione che non gli si addica più definirsi "giovane". E un mattino si sveglia... (I, 767).



3. Non spera nulla. Non riflette più su nulla. Avrà ancora tempo abbastanza per occuparsi della sua futura residenza e del suo futuro lavoro... Impacca le sue tre cose, quel paio di libri, i portacenere... Perciò fa un viaggio pieno di indugi, lento, un viaggio attraverso le province italiane. (I, 767).

4. Sulla fine del viaggio taceva. Non avrebbe voluto finirlo, alla fine avrebbe voluto scomparire, senza lasciare tracce, diventando introvabile. (I, 768).

The passages used in *My sweet car* echo the words from Bachmann that Tondelli decided to use in *Biglietti agli amici* and, perhaps, the most notable quality of the book is the way it accompanies and reflects the author's narrative works of his last years. Some of the cards in *Biglietti agli amici* were modified or rewritten to be inserted in other books. The card to F.G. (*Quarta ora della notte. Biglietto numero 4*) quotes the same verses from Joe Jackson's *We Can't Live Together* that Leo, the main character in *Camere separate*, will send to his lover Thomas to explain his point of view on their relationship:

Why can't you be just more like me,  
Or me like you.  
And why can't one and one  
Just add up to two.  
But  
We can't live together  
But, we can't stay apart. (I, 825 and CS, 1069).

The card to M.M. (*Seconda ora del giorno. Biglietto numero 14*):

In quel dicembre a Berlino, nella tua casa di Köpenickstrasse io volevo tutto. Ma era tutto, o solo qualcosa, o forse niente?  
Io volevo tutto e mi sono sempre dovuto accontentare di qualcosa. (I, 867).

is instead rewritten and re-used in the third part of *Camere separate*:

Un giorno, in treno, in uno scompartimento affollato Leo gli aveva detto, malinconico: “Io ho sempre voluto tutto Thomas. E mi sono sempre dovuto accontentare di qualcosa”. (I, 1081).

Rewriting can be considered as a hybrid practice, an intertextual process able on the one hand to absorb any kind of genre, technique or textual relation and, on the other, capable of producing new references, allusions and narrative parallelisms. Thus it can be defined as

An intertextual form that entails a strong tie to chronologically prior works, the trace of which is discernible in the text and is marked by the author as an intentional presence rather than as an elusive, faint echo. This rewriting is usually—and strikingly—*there* in various degrees of obviousness and thus relates to self-referential/self-reflexive literature.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to underline that the carefully crafted architecture of *Biglietti agli amici* and the continuous series of quotations and connections among texts are not a display of erudition, but rather a way to put on the page the author's dialogue with his inner self and his constant search for the sublimation of everyday sorrows. All the quotations in the book are therefore variations on three obsessive themes that will become central in Tondelli's last novel. They are: 1) Love as desertion; 2) Journey as escape; 3) Writing as salvation.

The structural model for this book of quotations is Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Buch der Freunde* (1922), but its main referent is undoubtedly Roland Barthes's *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (1977), which Tondelli called 'la mia seconda o terza Bibbia, insieme al *Libro tibetano dei morti* e,

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<sup>3</sup> Christian Moraru, *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2001, p. 19.

naturalmente, ai Salmi' (II, 803). Of Barthes's book Tondelli especially appreciates the thoroughness and depth of insight:

*Frammenti di un discorso amoroso* si presta a questo tipo di lettura. È scritto a brevissimi capitoletti—ottanta—ognuno dei quali è contrassegnato da un titolo che corrisponde a una particolare figura della situazione amorosa: "Angoscia", "Appagamento", "Assenza", "Corpo", "Cuore", "Dichiarazione", "Esilio", "Gelosia", "Incontro", "Io ti amo", "Piangere", "Scenata", "Suicidio", "Tenerezza", "Unione", "Vie di uscita" [...] Non si tratta di un manuale: non vi dirà come comportarvi né cosa fare per togliervi dall'affanno e dall'ingombro di un abbandono. Non ha trama, se non quella dell'indagine dei movimenti amorosi. Ogni capitolo è indipendente: potete leggerne uno oggi e il seguente fra cinque anni. Roland Barthes vi darà comunque uno specchio bellissimo per riflettere, pensare, decidere, paragonare la vostra storia a quella di Werther o a un haiku giapponese; vi darà un respiro più ampio in cui emettere il vostro rantolo e, improvvisamente, la coscienza del vostro amore si rafforzerà. (II, 804).

Starting from the idea that '*le discours amoureux est aujourd'hui d'une extrême solitude*', Barthes tries to propose a

Portrait [...] mais ce portrait n'est pas psychologique; il est structural: il donne à lire une place de parole: la place de quelqu'un qui parle en lui-même, amoureuxment, face à l'autre (l'objet aimé), qui ne parle pas [...] L'absence devient une pratique active, un *affairement* (qui m'empêche de rien faire d'autre); il y a création d'une fiction aux rôles multiples (doutes, reproches, désirs, mélancolies). Cette mise en scène langagière éloigne la mort de l'autre [...] Manipuler l'absence, c'est allonger ce moment, retarder aussi longtemps que possible l'instant où l'autre pourrait basculer sèchement de l'absence dans la mort.<sup>4</sup>

The *fading* of the loved object, replaced by the lover's voice, provokes a dialogue *in absentia* of the interlocutor which is a central idea of that 'fenomenologia dell'abbandono' which appears as the core of Tondelli's considerations during his

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<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1977, pp. 7-22.

last years. This phenomenology of desertion is structurally sustained by a new interest in the use of fragments as literary tools. The so-called 'poetica del frammento' had been developed by the writer since a conference held in Florence in 1984 and then extended in some short stories written between 1984 and 1987 which will be used as preparatory drafts for *Camere separate*.<sup>5</sup>

Another interesting feature of *Biglietti agli amici* is that the publication of the book coincided with Tondelli's thirtieth birthday and consequently was charged with a new form of awareness witnessed by the recurrence in the volume of passages and impressions connected to the in-depth reading of Ingeborg Bachmann's *Das dreissigste Jahr*.

The importance attributed to Bachmann's work—and also to the work of another Austrian writer Peter Handke, characterized by the same intimist attitude—testifies to an apparent change in Tondelli's literary tastes, and also a change in his forms of intertextual practice. During the preparation and writing of what was destined to be his last novel, the author appears to be increasingly willing to discuss the works of these two writers who, to a certain extent, seem to take the place of his beloved Americans in his literary preferences. This perception of a change of taste is partly correct, but it would be a mistake to generalize the idea: Tondelli struggles now to grow up, he tries to work out a new and more profound *Weltanschauung* and this inevitably influences his literary interests. There is therefore a general shift towards writers characterized by a more personal and pensive attitude, even among the English-speaking ones. It is in this context that Tondelli's interest in books such as Christopher Isherwood's *A*

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<sup>5</sup> Namely, *Pier a Gennaio*, *Ragazzi a Natale*, *Questa specie di patto* and *My sweet car*.

*Single Man* and David Leavitt's *The Lost Language of Cranes* and *Equal Affections*, which will be further discussed later in the chapter, must be placed. From this perspective Peter Handke's *Der Chinese des Schmerzes* (1983) seems especially resonant with some of the themes touched on by Tondelli in *Camere separate*.<sup>6</sup> In Handke's book, Andreas Loser, a quiet archaeologist and professor of classics, kills a man—who is guilty of defacing a tree with a swastika—thus crossing an invisible threshold and finding himself stuck in a purgatory that he won't be allowed to leave until he can confess his crime. Handke's Andreas and Tondelli's Leo share a very similar position as they struggle to come to terms with the loss they have provoked—Andreas by killing a man and Leo with his conscious ousting of Thomas from his everyday life. They cross a threshold identifiable as a limit, a boundary in their own existences where things do not cease to be, but slowly change. The journey is bound from the outside—the surrounding reality—to the inside—their inner world—and crossing the threshold for Andreas and Leo means looking at the world with different eyes:

Lo sguardo gettato sulla soglia è uno sguardo differente e diverso, che rischiarà, illumina, ascolta con gli occhi e origlia con le palpebre i punti di passaggio. È lo sguardo della pienezza e della purezza. È lo sguardo del lento ritorno a casa. (II, 811)

The importance attributed to the action of staring turns the characters into 'watchers' often engaged in contemplating a void that could either be represented by the grim reality of certain descriptions—some images of Salzburg in Handke and the characterization of London in *Camere separate*—or by their own sense of

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<sup>6</sup> There is also a certain structural homology between the two books. Like *Camere separate* Handke's book is divided in three chapters. In the Italian translation they are: "Il contemplatore viene sviato", "Il contemplatore interviene" and "Il contemplatore cerca un testimone".

displacement. In a review of *Der Chinese des Schmerzes* Tondelli compares Handke's void—which is not a dead place, but a meaningful entity—to the Buddhist one:

“il nulla zen non è privo di vita, come il vuoto, ma al contrario è una realtà totalmente vivente; non solo è vivente, ma ha anche un cuore” (Hisamatsu), il vuoto e la soglia handkeana sono luoghi da cui si elabora il senso. (II, 811-2).

'So Glad to Grow Older': 'Camere separate'

In April 1989, Bompiani published *Camere separate*, Tondelli's last novel. The book was the result of a long period of reflection and a further development of the themes already present in *Biglietti agli amici*. After the huge popular success and controversy surrounding *Rimini*, the writer seemed to be ready to give a new direction to his work. The preparatory work for the new book is well-documented in Tondelli's personal archive, which is a precious source for understanding the implications and the general meaning of what could be considered his spiritual legacy. In a letter to François Wahl dated 4 December 1985, he writes:

Ogni libro è stato per me, finora, una grossa avventura esistenziale, ogni libro ha chiuso e rilanciato un grande periodo della mia vita [...] Per questo il prossimo romanzo dovrà necessariamente riflettere un nuovo scatto della mia esperienza. Non so quando questo avverrà [...] Ma probabilmente sarà così. (I, 1208-9).

A personal modification thus appears to be the necessary background for a new work; another letter to his French translator, of 7 March 1987, outlines the critical aspect that the novel will probably have:

Il progetto del nuovo romanzo si sta delineando sempre di più nella mia testa e nei miei disegni. Ma ancora è presto per mettersi a scrivere. Il fatto è che non potrà non essere che un *romanzo di crisi*. Dopo tutto quel narrare di *Rimini* è fondamentale per me riflettere, pensare, criticare, studiare questo mio lavoro: un libro, la scrittura, lo stile, il linguaggio [...] Sarà una prova molto difficile [...] Sarà un passaggio per crescere. (I, 1210).

The thematic core of the novel seems thus to be clear since the first preparatory notes: it will be a love story based on the principle of ‘separate rooms’ with two lovers who ‘si appartengono, ma in un modo speciale. Si appartengono ma non si possiedono [...] Forse si amano’ (I, 1211).

This idea of the lovers who, even though profoundly in love, feel the need to stay apart from each other, is constitutive of Tondelli’s new view of the world. The book is therefore framed around a double desertion between two lovers: Leo and Thomas. The first desertion is a consequence of Leo’s peculiar idea of love:

Sapeva, fin dall’inizio, che mai lui avrebbe potuto essere “tutto”. Per questo chiamava il loro amore “camere separate”. Lui viveva il contatto con Thomas come sapendo, intimamente, che prima o poi si sarebbero lasciati. La separazione era una forza costitutiva della loro relazione. (I, 1071).

If the first desertion is of a purely theoretical nature, the second is the tragic and definitive outcome of Thomas’ death, which will be the starting point of Leo’s existential journey.

Unlike Tondelli’s previous books, *Camere separate* does not record events in a chronological order and it is not so focused on actual events in the

protagonists' lives; it is based instead on an internal perception of the passing of time. The novel progresses following the pace suggested by

La digressione, la memoria, il flashback, la giustapposizione di alcuni motivi che vengono continuamente ripresi, pur con ritmi di narrazione differenti (ora più lenti, ora più vibranti, ora più commossi). (I, 1218).

The novel's general structure resembles that of a score of minimalist music: there are no chapters as such, but rather three long 'movements': *Verso il silenzio*, *Il mondo di Leo* and *Camere separate*, which are then framed around smaller 'sub-scores':

Con *Camere separate* non volevo restituire una confessione. Dovevo trovare una forma: ho pensato che per me potesse essere molto spontanea e molto genuina una forma musicale, perché questa narrazione è come un canto. È il canto di una persona sola che riflette, che riassorbe tutto il proprio passato, che si proietta nel futuro, nelle proprie esperienze. Allora ho preferito sviluppare tre momenti, tutti più o meno con gli stessi temi e non con uno svolgimento della narrazione da un punto a un altro, in modo tale da farli coesistere e da farli interagire in ciascun movimento. Più o meno la narrazione è conclusa in ogni movimento, un po' come nella musica minimale o ambientale. C'è sempre la stessa nota, lo stesso gruppo di note, che si riproducono, quasi in circolo. Sembra sempre che non cambi niente, invece è un modo per scavare...Alla fine ti cambia la partitura. Questa è stata l'idea del libro. (II, 977).

In one of the preparatory notes for the book, Tondelli outlines its general structure as follows:

PRIMO MOVIMENTO - Verso il silenzio

(Leo&Thomas—Parigi—concerto - il trip...)

SECONDO MOVIMENTO - La conquista della solitudine

a) Viaggiatore solitario - Londra

b) Milano - La scrittura - Il paese natale fra casa e cimitero - Il venerdì santo (Barcellona - Saragozza)



c)l'inferno della solitudine, strip-tease, la carriera del puttaniere, la marchetta, il padre orfano  
 TERZO MOVIMENTO - Camere separate  
 (Rinascita del desiderio - Pranzo del vedovo...Posizioni sentimentali a tre)  
 Finale: "Fra qualche giorno, fra qualche anno..." (I, 1213).

This structure, in spite of some slight dissimilarities, is already close to the definitive edition of the book.

Tondelli underlines the continuity of *Camere separate* with his other works in another preparatory draft:

Mi sembra un po' di accedere alla quintessenza di quanto ho fatto finora. Di mettere in luce quella voce che ha scritto gli altri libri e che ora, più consapevole di sé, fa a meno delle mascherature (delle strutture) e tenta di vibrare da sola. Gli altri erano libri senza passato, volutamente tutti giocati sul presente. *Camere separate* è un po' quel passato. (I, 1217).

A deeper literary awareness accompanies Tondelli's maturity. As I suggested in the section above on *Biglietti agli amici*, reaching his thirtieth year does not leave him unaltered and his new perspective is now adjacent to that of Bachmann:

Wenn einer in sein dreißigstes Jahr geht, wird man nicht aufhören, ihn jung zu nennen. Er selber aber, obgleich er keine Veränderungen an sich entdecken kann, wird unsicher; ihm ist, als stünde es ihm nicht mehr zu, sich für jung auszugeben. Und eines Morgens wacht er auf, an einem Tag, den er vergessen wird, und liegt plötzlich da, ohne sich erheben zu können, getroffen von harten Lichtstrahlen und entblößt jeder Waffe und jeden Muts für den neuen Tag [...] Er sinkt und sinkt, und der Schrei wird nicht laut [...] und er stürzt hinunter ins Bodenlose, bis ihm die Sinne schwinden [...]<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ingeborg Bachmann, *Das dreissigste Jahr*, Munich, Piper, 1961, p. 19.

'When a person enters his thirtieth year people will not stop calling him young. But he himself, although he can discover no changes in himself, becomes unsure; he feels as though he were no longer entitled to claim to be young. And one morning he wakes up, on a day which he will forget, and suddenly lies there unable to get up, struck by harsh rays of light and denuded of every weapon and all courage with which to face the new day [...] He sinks and sinks and his shout does not become audible [...] and he crashes down into a fathomless abyss, until his senses fade away'.

Furthermore, to turn thirty also means officially to abandon the phase of youth in order finally to achieve a certain degree of maturity. According to this perspective, the book could also be read as a portrait of the artist first as a young man and then as an almost middle-aged man, as a desertion by the thirty-something Tondelli of his younger self. In this sense, we could consider both Leo and Thomas as the writer's alter egos, only in different periods of his life. It could thus be interesting to notice how, for instance, the descriptions of Thomas (especially in two significant passages of the book, where Leo imagines himself waiting for him in an airport lounge) closely resemble some photographs of Tondelli in his twenties taken during the late 1970s. It would be worth giving these two examples to clarify this sort of internal identification. In the first passage, at the beginning of the book, Leo is flying between Paris and Munich and fantasizes about meeting Thomas (who has been dead now for two years) at the airport:

Vede [...] la figura dinoccolata che si dirige impaziente verso alcune vetrine in cui sono esposte scatole di tabacco per pipa e sgargianti confezioni di sigari Avana. Immagina il suo maglione slabbrato, la giacca di lana pesante, i pantaloni di velluto, le scarpe grandi, robuste, di cuoio bordeaux. Vede i suoi liquidi occhi neri, il sorriso largo e disteso, le braccia ossute. (I, 914-915).

In the second passage, Leo arrives in Germany and waits for Thomas, who is late, at the arrivals lounge. In their relationship they are slowly drifting apart and Leo

fears a sense of impending 'impossibilità di riconoscimento'. While waiting, he imagines

Thomas [...] vestito soltanto dei suoi maglioni slabbrati, la pipa stretta in una mano e quella sua aria timida, sempre un po' a disagio in mezzo alla folla. (I, 1072).

These distinctive features—the baggy jumpers, the pipe, the corduroy trousers, the clumsy attitude and shambling pace—make Thomas quite a detailed look-alike of the writer in his youth. The way Leo describes Thomas after their first meeting is noteworthy in this respect: Thomas is a 'non-blonde', as Tondelli was, and has something of the 'tipo nordico degli anni settanta' (I, 922) who resembles the writer's physical type.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, the description of Leo mirrored in an airplane window is that of an older man, an older identity of Tondelli himself. Of this image, the narrator underlines the unfamiliarity, the difficulty that Leo has in acknowledging that face as 'his face', a recognition which would be a simple matter for an external viewer but is not so straightforward for the one who is directly involved. This feeling of 'not quite knowing one's face' is also described in a book that may be considered one of the major influences on *Camere separate*: Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964). There are a considerable number of similarities between the two novels. George, Isherwood's protagonist, is a middle aged homosexual who grieves over the loss of his long-term lover, Jim, who has been killed in a car accident. At the beginning of the book, we find George looking at his reflection in his bathroom mirror:

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<sup>8</sup> I think it is worth recalling here that Tondelli constantly remarks, especially in *Pao Pao*, on the height and northern features of his group of friends as something absolutely central: 'ragazzi bellissimi e altissimi [...] questa [...] è tutta una storia di gente alta e gente bella, di eroi da romanzo, impervi, granitici, sublimi [...] È per loro, gli altissimi, che ricordo'. (I, 190-191).

What it sees there isn't so much a face as the expression of a predicament. Here's what he has done to itself, here's the mess it has somehow managed to get itself into, during its fifty-eight years; expressed in terms of a dull harassed stare, a coarsened nose, a mouth dragged down by the corners into a grimace as if at the sourness of its own toxins, cheeks sagging from their anchors of muscle, a throat hanging limp in tiny wrinkled folds. The harassed look is that of a desperately tired swimmer or runner; yet there is no question of stopping. The creature we are watching will struggle on and on until it drops. Not because it is heroic. It can imagine no alternative. Staring and staring into the mirror, it sees many faces within its face—the face of the child, the boy, the young man, the not-so-young man—all present still, preserved like fossils on superimposed layers, and, like fossils, dead.<sup>9</sup>

Here is Tondelli's description of Leo's face in the windowpane:

La sua faccia, quella che gli altri riconoscevano da anni come 'lui'—e che a lui invece appariva ogni giorno più strana, poiché l'immagine che conservava del proprio volto era sempre e immortalmamente quella del sé giovane e del sé ragazzo—una volta di più gli parve strana. Continuava a pensarsi e a vedersi come l'innocente [...] ma l'immagine che vedeva contro quello sfondo acceso era semplicemente il viso di una persona non più tanto giovane, con pochi capelli fini in testa, gli occhi gonfi, le labbra turgide e un po' cascanti, la pelle degli zigomi screziata di capillari come le guance cupree di suo padre [...] un viso che subiva [...] la corruzione e i segni del tempo. Solo qualche mese fa ha compiuto trentadue anni. (I, 913-914).

Both passages underline the corruption that time brings over one's face and share the same physical details: the turgid and sagging line of the mouth, the wrinkled skin, the dull and swollen eyes, but they also seem to have in common the feeling that a face is a multi-layered entity, where all the previous incarnations—childhood, youth, adulthood, middle age—continue to linger in an almost imperceptible way. The legitimate owner of the face seems not to realize all the

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man*, London, Minerva, 1991, p. 8.

changes he has gone through, and seeing himself in a mirror becomes a first-time imprinting and a necessary, though sometimes painful, acquaintance with a completely new self.

The relation that connects a writer to his characters creates an interesting parallel between *Camere separate* and James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962). In *Another Country*, three of the characters—Rufus, Eric and Vivaldo—are, in varying degrees, manifestations of Baldwin himself. In particular, Rufus and Vivaldo seem to share some traits with Thomas and Leo in Tondelli's novel. Like Thomas, Rufus dies, committing suicide almost at the beginning of the book, but he does not disappear from the other characters' lives: once freed from their mundane existence, both figures linger in the background, influencing the lives and the choices of the others, showing them their disconnection from the world and suggesting how they might overcome it. Even more interesting appears to be the link between Baldwin's Vivaldo and Tondelli's Leo. Like Leo, Vivaldo is a novelist who suffers from writer's block. Their struggle against creativity, their exile from the surrounding world and even their inner selves, is not just to do with technical reasons, but is connected rather to their sexuality and inability to handle relationships. Writing about Vivaldo, James A. Dievler argues:

His exile experience (in the state-of-mind sense) is attached to his ability or inability to write [...] His struggles with writing are equated with his struggle to connect with his world—a connection painted by Baldwin mostly in terms of Vivaldo's sex life [...] At one point Vivaldo is talking to Rufus and his typewriter at the same time: "A lot of things hurt you that I can't really understand." He played with the keys of his typewriter. "A lot of things hurt me that I can't really understand." It is only through writing that Vivaldo is able to mitigate the sense of exile that kills Rufus.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> James A. Dievler, 'Sexual Exiles', in *James Baldwin Now*, ed. by Dwight A. McBride, New York and London, New York University Press, 1999, pp. 161-83 (pp. 170-5).

Vivaldo's and Leo's failure to supersede established identity categories in their love lives leaves them lonely and unable to write. Their stories of writers' block parallel their relationships with their lovers, in whom they recognize the same degree of mystery and impenetrability. Baldwin writes:

Her face would now be, forever, more mysterious and impenetrable than the face of any stranger. Strangers' faces hold no secrets because the imagination does not invest them with any. But the face of a lover is an unknown precisely because it is invested with so much of oneself. It is a mystery, containing, like all mysteries, the possibility of torment.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly in Tondelli we read:

Cosa sapeva lui del suo compagno? [...] Tanti piccoli particolari, più o meno significativi. Ma Leo ancora non era entrato pienamente nella vita dell'altro [...] C'erano notti in cui, dormendo con Thomas, improvvisamente apriva gli occhi e lo vedeva irrigidito a fissare nel vuoto. Gli si accostava chiedendogli a cosa stesse pensando e Thomas rispondeva, spaventato, sull'orlo del panico: "Chi sei? Con chi sto dormendo?". E Leo capiva che in quel momento Thomas non stava chiedendogli chi realmente fosse, ma quale specie di bizzarria semantica esistesse da fargli dividere il letto con uno sconosciuto. E non riusciva a rispondere a questa domanda, atterrito dal sentimento di separazione e di privazione, stava immobile, con gli occhi sbarrati a chiedersi per quale motivo giacesse accanto a un carnefice, a qualcuno che lo stava crudelmente spossessando del sé. (I, 964).

Both writers link self-knowledge with knowledge of the other through the experience of love. Their inability to recognize and understand themselves becomes an inability to love the other and thus an inability to create.

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<sup>11</sup> James Baldwin, *Another Country*, New York, Dial, 1962, p. 172.

*The First Movement: 'Verso il silenzio'*

In the first movement of the book, after the episode of the window, the author recalls the circumstances of the first meeting between Leo and Thomas. They are in Paris, and, after a first brief encounter, they decide to see each other again during a Bronski Beat concert. The place is crowded and only after a lot of effort, and as the band is playing an emblematic song, *I Feel Love*, do they eventually manage to meet up. Their relationship seems to be born from the beginning under the sign of distance and difficulty. Their staying together is immediately identified as something hard to achieve. After this episode, the first of many time warps brings us beside Thomas' deathbed. Tondelli underlines how much the illness has changed Thomas, who looks exhausted, small and harmless. In his harassed stare, which will also be his stare on the plane, Leo recognizes a childlike element, the imploring stare of abused children all around the world. Thomas' stare is the gaze of someone who is dying and hopelessly implores for help, a help that he knows he will not get. This episode is extremely important because it introduces two main motifs of the novel.

The first of these is the idea of death. From this moment on its presence and inevitability will surround and envelop Leo throughout his quest for a meaning and a chance of rebirth. Towards the end of the first movement a flashback will connect this moment to another episode of Leo's youth, specifically, to the moment when he first becomes aware of the existence of death. The episode in question is the story of a night spent in search of drugs through the Po Valley that ends near the river's delta with Leo, completely lost in a narcotic

trip, questioning himself about his origins, his life and his future, having already in mind a possibility of rebirth identified with the gift of speech:

Era solo, perduto a velocità interstellare [...] sempre più distante [...] Non sentiva né il freddo né il caldo, né il bene né il male. Era troppo abissalmente lontano [...] Non si rendeva conto di quanto tempo fosse passato. Ma passato da quando? Quando era iniziata la storia? E che genere di storia? La sua storia? O quella dell'Altro? Ma chi era lui? Era profondamente se stesso, ma nello stesso tempo era nessuno. Nessuno. Sentì d'impazzire, una, dieci, cento milioni di volte [...] Sentiva il brusio dei neuroni correre impazziti da un lato all'altro di un labirinto che non aveva lati e che [...] non avrebbe mai avuto un limite [...] Voleva morire e trovare la pace. Ma era già morto e sapeva che la pace non era nemmeno là [...] Improvvisamente si vide, anche se dall'esterno, anche se da molto distante. Si vide in quel fosso e fu come se lo riconoscesse [...] Le cose si ingigantivano dentro di lui e si schiodavano, facevano saltare i sensi. I suoi sensi e il senso della realtà e il senso di quell'irrealtà che sono le parole. Come ogni uomo lui aveva solo quelle per restare sulla terra. La loro terapia lo avrebbe salvato. Pregò che non lo lasciassero. (I, 949-950).

This account recalls some of the most anxious pages of *Altri libertini*—especially the short stories *Postoristoro* and *Autobahn*—with the same settings and the same characters and it is thus characterized by a strong sense of *Ringkomposition*. For instance in *Autobahn*, the protagonist, attracted by the smell of the North Sea, decides to leave his country and to escape following that aroma of freedom. In *Camere separate*, instead, Leo is urged, by the smell of his motherland, to come back home. This episode marks for him the end of his youth and the beginning of a tiring journey of personal rediscovery and rebirth:

Fu un odore a riportarlo a casa. A fargli capire che stava ormai arrivando, che il viaggio, o almeno quella parte eccessiva del viaggio, stava per avere termine. L'odore era forte, distinguibile fra le nebbie profumate di vino e di terra marcia. Gli fece allargare i polmoni e camminare ricurvo per trattenerlo maggiormente. Era l'odore della sua terra, di una campagna in cui vivevano più porci che uomini. (I, 953).



The role of a particular smell as the means through which to proceed to a reconquest of one's personality and values is also stated in a book that Tondelli knew well: Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984). At the end of the novel, Jamie Conway, the main character, after another night spent wandering aimlessly from club to club, realizes that the time has come for him to reconsider and change his life. His decision is somehow quickened by a smell he suddenly perceives and that reminds him of his youth:

The smell of bread washes over you like a gentle rain. You inhale deeply to fill your lungs. Tears come to your eyes, and you feel such a rush of tenderness and pity that you stop [...] The smell of bread recalls you to another morning. You arrived home from college after driving half the night; you just felt like [...] coming home. When you walked in, the kitchen was steeped in this same aroma [...] You get down on your knees and tear open the bag. The smell of warm dough envelops you. The first bite sticks to your throat and you almost gag. You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again.<sup>12</sup>

The olfactory sense is used in both cases to keep a grip on reality and also as a way to rediscover lost principles. Again, the smell turns itself into a *smellscape*, a concept that suggests that, like visual impressions, smells may be spatially ordered or place-related. In his discussion of the concept of *smellscape* Iacoli specifically refers to the works of Douglas Porteous and Paul Rodaway.<sup>13</sup> According to Porteous smells are very basic and emotional entities and thus differ from vision or sound, which tend instead to involve cognition.<sup>14</sup> Due to their fundamental emotionality, smells can be extremely meaningful and work either as

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<sup>12</sup> Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, London, Flamingo, 1986, pp. 181-2.

<sup>13</sup> Iacoli, p. 132.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Porteous, 'Smellscape', in *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 9 (1985), no. 3, pp. 356-78.

tools of description of a new place or as memory-releasers for the reconstruction of childhood. In further discussing the characteristics of the olfactory sense, Rodaway underlines that:

1. It enables us to identify distinctive odours and associate them with particular sources [...] and/or situations. Olfaction offers a sensuous geography, sometimes described as 'smellscapes'.
2. It is inclusive of a physical sensation (chemical) and mental activity (thinking), and odour memory is especially important, being often long and accurate. Olfaction plays an important part in remembering in general and the association of current and past place experiences.
3. It is an adaptive sensitivity, which is excited by novelty but dulled by familiarity, or habituation. Perhaps in this sense, olfaction has an important warning function by drawing our attention to change in the environment.
4. It is strongly associated with the emotions and the encounter with specific smells and smell intensities excite particular emotional responses - though such correlations are not always simple nor can they be generalised for all individuals or cultures.<sup>15</sup>

When olfaction concurs in the description of a new place, the element of adaptation must be considered as something vital because, as Rodaway notes, the intensity of a smell rapidly declines after a first exposure to it. This does not mean that the smell disappears, but rather that one gets used to it, and this decreases its evocative power. As Porteous writes:

This habituation effect is crucial in humanistic studies, for [...] almost all literary descriptions of smells (with the exception of childhood memories which are distanced in time rather than space) are the work of non-residents. Thus in the humanistic study of smellscapes [...] the insider:outsider antinomy is a crucial one.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*, London & New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 64-5.

<sup>16</sup> Porteous, p. 358.

In the works of Tondelli, we can identify both of these uses. A new smell is often employed by the writer in order to mark a distinctive quality of a place and strongly influences the positive or negative perception of the place itself.<sup>17</sup> But a smell can also, as in the passage quoted from *Camere separate*, give way to a complex psychological process—what we could call a Proustian ‘madeleine effect’—of recovery of childhood.

The second element traceable in the episode of Thomas’ death is that of the social invisibility, and thus the social non-existence, of homosexual love. In the most crucial time of his life, Thomas must be handed back to his legitimate owners: the members of his family:

Leo capisce che deve andarsene. Thomas è restituito, nel momento finale, alla famiglia, alle stesse persone che l’hanno fatto nascere e che ora, con il cuore devastato dalla sofferenza, stanno cercando di aiutarlo a morire. Non c’è posto per lui in questa ricomposizione [...] non c’è un solo registro canonico sulla faccia della terra su cui siano vergate le firme dei testimoni della loro unione [...] è come se [...] gli dicessero vi siete divertiti e questo va bene. Ma qui stiamo combattendo per la vita [...] E noi, un padre, una madre, un figlio siamo le figure reali della vita. Leo sente allora l’inezienza della propria vita abissalmente separata dai grandi accadimenti del vivere e del morire. Come se avesse sempre vissuto in una zona separata della società [...] Ora finiva la rappresentazione. I padri e le madri, la chiesa, lo stato, gli uffici d’anagrafe ristabilivano il loro possesso. Riordinavano, consegnavano tutto alla polvere azzerante degli archivi. (I, 940).

This same feeling of exclusion and final invisibility is shared in *A Single Man* by Isherwood’s George who is so aware of the social incomprehensibility of his relationship that he prefers to avoid the subject straight away pretending that Jim is still alive and well, and will remain somewhere ‘in the East indefinitely’. In his

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<sup>17</sup> There are numerous examples of this use in Tondelli’s books. In particular see the short stories *Viaggio* and *Autobahn* in *Altri libertini*.

imaginary dialogue with his neighbour, Mrs Strunk, who reads cheap psychology books and is therefore ready to pity, rather than blame, homosexuality, George makes clear his position on the common idea of same-sex relationships as *divertissement* ('una piccola avventura di collegio', as Tondelli writes) or surrogates for something else:

But your book is wrong, Mrs Strunk, says George, when it tells you that Jim is the substitute I found for a real son, a real kid brother, a real husband, a real wife. Jim wasn't a substitute for anything. And there is no substitute for Jim, if you'll forgive my saying so, anywhere.<sup>18</sup>

The awareness of the impossibility of being part of Thomas' last days, or even of admitting to her that Jim has died, epitomizes the condition of homosexual love which is presented in these two books as one of the loneliest things in the world. A gay man or lesbian is not only deprived, in case of death, of the person whom s/he loves, but in most cases s/he cannot even expect any kind of sympathy from society for the plain fact that s/he has been deprived of this person. As Lisa M. Schwerdt has argued, a homosexual can rarely admit to the outside world that he really loved that other person and therefore, that being the case, he cannot even have the smallest consolation of people sharing his grief.<sup>19</sup>

Tondelli's thinking about homosexuality seems to come in his last novel to a complete awareness. This long-awaited coming to terms with this issue is the result of the writer's difficult relation with public opinion. On the one hand, Tondelli is a literary and cultural product of those 'collettivi gay autonomi' that, around 1977, were the core of the Italian gay movement:

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<sup>18</sup> Isherwood, pp. 22-3.

<sup>19</sup> Lisa M. Schwerdt, *Isherwood's Fiction. The Self and Technique*, London, MacMillan Press, 1989.

[Il] movimento del '77, che scoppiò con rabbia pari all'impotenza di cambiare il corso degli eventi [...] era anche [...] una radicale esplosione di creatività, di ansia di vivere ed essere altro dal prestabilito. I giovani si sentivano "diversi", ma [...] non più protagonisti di un'evoluzione progressiva [...] di qui il maggior senso di marginalità giovanile e la voglia di opporre alla realtà prevedibile qualcosa di completamente opposto. Per alcuni finì per essere la lotta armata, per altri l'eroina, per altri ancora restò la sperimentazione di modelli di vita alternativi. In questo contesto gli omosessuali si trovarono per la prima volta ad essere parte del movimento in una condizione di pari dignità, cioè diversi tra altri diversi.<sup>20</sup>

But, on the other hand, the writer is a very shy and reserved example of a public figure. In Tondelli's books homosexuality is never denied or hidden—they are in fact extremely explicit books from this point of view—but it is not regarded as a political issue, as it is for instance in Isherwood's works, where the affirmation of homosexual rights and the public recognition of the value of homoerotic love have considerable importance. Tondelli is not avoiding the problem of homosexuality according to Arbasino's principle that a problem does not exist if it is not clearly mentioned;<sup>21</sup> rather, he is avoiding the tendency to address the condition of being gay as a social or political matter. He considers the label of 'homosexual writer' to be inconsistent and too narrow to encompass all the characteristics of a writer: 'la componente omosessuale o razziale o la differenza di sesso non può evidentemente racchiudere tutte le componenti di uno scrittore'.<sup>22</sup> As Dominique Fernandez writes:

<sup>20</sup> Gianni Rossi Barilli, *Il movimento gay in Italia*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1999, pp. 90-1.

<sup>21</sup> 'Perchè quando un argomento è tabù è come nell'Italia fascista, non esiste - se manca il Vocabolo manca anche il Concetto, e a maggior ragione la Cosa, no? - dunque si può andare in trattoria e in carrozza con dieci bersaglieri in divisa, la gente non vede'. Alberto Arbasino, *Fratelli d'Italia*, Turin, Einaudi, 1976, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Gnerre, p. 34.

Crainte qu'on ne dise de mon livre: «C'est un roman homosexuel». Et alors? Je n'accepterai cette définition que le jour où la même toise sera appliquée à tous les livres. Songe-t-on à regrouper *La Chartreuse de Parme*, *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karénine*, dans la famille du «roman hétérosexuel»? On demande des comptes à Emma sur la qualité de son amour, non sur l'identité de ses partenaires. Pourquoi le sexe devrait-il servir de référence et fournir un critère seulement aux œuvres des écrivains qui ne sont pas hétérosexuels? [...] Cette discrimination, injuste et blessante, repose sur l'axiome le plus absurde. Parler de ce qui passe entre un homme et une femme relèverait de la «nature humaine» et «universelle». Entre deux garçons, on resterait dans le «particulier», dans le «spécial».<sup>23</sup>

Starting from a similar attitude, we have in *Altri libertini* and *Pao Pao* a new and alternative representation of homosexuals, separate from the ideological framework of the writings of Mario Mieli, the main Italian spokesperson in this period for the principle of homosexuality as a form of political militancy.<sup>24</sup> The fundamental feature of Tondelli's depiction of gayness is the lack of any form of victimizing attitude. His books are characterized by a strong will to self-assertion, which goes beyond codified schematizations. At the beginning of the 1980s, personal issues were, for many people in Italy, becoming more important than political ones and Tondelli's first two books seem to testify to this change of perspective. As Filippo La Porta writes:

Questa fiducia adolescente, questo empito libertario ed emancipativo hanno costituito, nel clima politico-culturale di quegli anni, un'alternativa al plumbeo "estremismo" di terrorismo e lotta armata.<sup>25</sup>

The case of *Rimini* is, even from this perspective, a watershed in the writer's production; it marks Tondelli's desertion of alternative culture and the progressive

<sup>23</sup> Dominique Fernandez, *L'étoile rose*, Paris, Grasset, 1978, pp. 377-8.

<sup>24</sup> Mario Mieli, *Elementi di critica omosessuale*, Turin, Einaudi, 1977.

<sup>25</sup> Filippo La Porta, *La nuova narrativa italiana*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 1999, p. 50.

evolution of the 'fenomenologia dell'abbandono'. The character of Bruno May introduces the type of the homosexual in some way persecuted by his own condition. His lover Aelred, although involved in his relationship with Bruno, constantly feels the absence of something else, namely the presence in his life of a woman. This destabilizing and destructive element is the cause of Bruno's acute perception of the impossibility of self-fulfilment and will ultimately be at the root of his suicide. In *Camere separate*, the awareness of the need for an acknowledgement of homosexual love is stronger than ever and finally acquires the traits of political consciousness, especially in the episode of Thomas' death when 'I padri e le madri, la chiesa, lo stato, gli uffici d'anagrafe ristabilivano il loro possesso' on Thomas' dying body, thus legitimizing the official character of their presence beside that bed, a presence that Leo cannot in any way justify.

*The Second Movement: 'Il mondo di Leo'*

The second movement of the book opens on a scene in autumn. Again, as we have already seen in Tondelli's other books, the time of year works as the background of the protagonist's feelings, which are in this case restlessness and incipient melancholy. Leo feels the urge to go away in order to get a chance 'per ricapitolarsi'; he therefore leaves, alone, early one morning. The dynamics of this fictionalized departure recall a passage from a text written by Tondelli in 1987, *Viaggiatore solitario*, which is influenced, in its turn, by Ingeborg Bachmann's already-mentioned *Das dreissigste Jahr*.<sup>26</sup> In order to clarify these connections, it

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<sup>26</sup> The similarity between Tondelli's novel and article is also evident in the reprise of a couple of episodes: namely the sudden appearance of the Russian ship (*VS* p. 354; *CS* p. 969) and the journey between Greece and Italy on the deck of the ferry (*VS* p. 354, *CS* p. 1097).

is worth reading the three passages in sequence. These are the first lines of the book's second movement:

Ogni anno l'autunno gli porta di questi sentimenti. Bisogno di silenzi, di solitudine, di ricordi. Bisogno di dormire. Di ricapitolarsi. Bisogno d'interiorità. La terra lo chiama a sé e lo invita a raccogliersi. E lui [...] sente questo richiamo e lo segue [...] una mattina, lascia la sua casa e si mette in viaggio [...] Sa solamente che deve mettersi in viaggio. Non sa più cosa fare di se stesso. Vorrebbe dormire anni [...] sdraiato in un bosco silenzioso [...] E ridestarsi cambiato. Vorrebbe camminare in silenzio attraverso i monti [...] sentire dentro di sé l'odore della terra che [...] continua a dissolversi e marcire [...] Vorrebbe non tornare mai più dal suo viaggio, perdersi su un binario morto e scomparire senza lasciarsi dietro alcuna traccia [...] Ha intenzione di fare un viaggio lento, attraverso l'Europa. Evitare i centri importanti e le capitali. Fermarsi [...] nelle piccole città di provincia. (I, 959-60).

A couple of years before *Camere separate*, Tondelli wrote:

Bisogno di silenzio, di solitudine, di dormire, di ricordare, di tacere, di sparire [...] mi è capitato di associare l'idea del viaggio autunnale all'idea di perdita di voce, quindi di silenzio [...] Sono partito perché mi sentivo un essere che nascondeva dentro di sé una perdita, una scomparsa nella quale si rispecchiava il proprio, personale, annientamento. Volevo vivere [...] ma come attraverso un letargo invisibile. Comunque sono partito, di notte, in treno, verso il Nord. (II, 350-1).

Both these passages seem to be connected to the following extract from Bachmann's short story:

Wenn er in sein dreißigstes Jahr geht und der Winter kommt, wenn eine Eisklammer November und Dezember zusammenhält und sein Herz frostet, schläft er ein über seinen Qualen. Er flieht in den Schlaf, flieht zurück ins Erwachen, flieht bleibend und reisend, geht durch die Verlassenheit kleiner Städte und kann keine Türklinke mehr niederdrücken, keinen Gruß mehr entbieten, weil er nicht angesehen und angesprochen werden will. Er möchte sich wie eine Zwiebel, wie eine Wurzel [...] Überwintern mit seinen Gedanken und Gefühlen. Mit einem



schrumpfenden Mund schweigen. Er wünscht, dass alle Äußerungen, Beleidigungen, Verheißungen, die er ausgesprochen hat, ungültig würden, vergessen bei allen und er vergessen bei allen.<sup>27</sup>

The autumnal season, with its silences and need for interiority, along with the urge for a solitary journey—which is clearly physical and psychological at the same time—are the key elements of these three passages. They will also be constituents, working as a frame, of the structure of this second part of the book. Immediately after his decision to leave, a flashback brings Leo back to another journey through Germany when Thomas was still alive and they were together. The moment of the year is the same: ‘L’autunno del continente lo sta abbagliando. Tutto va verso la quiete e il silenzio’ (I, 960). The circumstance is ideal for Leo to clarify his situation and it is precisely during this trip that he realizes the importance of his relationship with Thomas. This moment of awareness comes during a conference at a German university where Thomas is helping Leo as a translator. The audience’s approval and enthusiasm seem to give official recognition, in Leo’s eyes, to the existence of a connection between them. This is for Leo the discovery of a completely new dimension:

Non aveva mai creduto al valore dell’accettazione. Non gli importava [...] Era in se stesso che traeva valore e legge. Non dall’esterno. A nessuno avrebbe mai e poi mai concesso questo diritto [...] E invece in quell’aula universitaria era avvenuto per Leo un fatto strano. E c’era una sola spiegazione possibile: Thomas. Leo [...] non si presentava più all’esterno

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<sup>27</sup> Bachmann, pp. 45-6.

‘When he enters his thirtieth year and winter comes, when a peg of ice holds November and December together and his heart freezes, he falls asleep over his agonies. He flees into sleep, flees back into waking, flees staying still and travelling, goes through the loneliness of small towns and cannot press down the latches of any more doors, cannot utter any more greetings, because he does not want to be looked at or spoken to. He would like to burrow under the earth like a bulb, like a root [...] To hibernate with his thoughts and feelings. To remain silent with a shrivelling mouth. He wishes that all the statements, insults, promises he has uttered would become invalid, forgotten by everyone and he himself forgotten too’ (p. 38).

come Leo, ma come Leo-con-Thomas. Non viveva più solo [...] E il mondo doveva prenderne atto [...] l'amore ha bisogno del mondo, per potersi affermare e Leo sapeva come la felicità avesse bisogno di restare *mondana* per potersi appagare [...] Aveva necessità che il mondo prendesse atto di questa nuova vita, che la tenesse in sé con amore. (I, 967).

All of a sudden Leo realizes how much a love relationship needs to be acknowledged by society in order to succeed. This awareness is the source of a new kind of anguish for him for he feels on his shoulders all the pressure of this coming out into the open with the world and he fears he will not be up to the task:

Era disperato. E non sapeva perché. Amava Thomas [...] Eppure tutto questo non riusciva a placarlo. Si sentiva ormai in gioco e forse era proprio questo a spaventarlo. Non poteva più tornare indietro [...] Avrebbe dovuto affrontare tutto in un modo diverso. L'angoscia di quello che lo aspettava [...] lo prese allo stomaco. Cosa sarebbe successo il giorno dopo? E fra un mese? Fra un anno? C'era un futuro per loro? Sarebbe stato capace di difendere questo amore? Non sarebbero morti entrambi? Non era tutto inutile? Sentì un'ondata di pietà e di contrizione immergergli il cuore. E abbassò la testa. (I, 968).

He seems to be caught between two extreme positions, what in *A Single Man* Isherwood calls the dichotomy between 'flirtation and fucking', where 'flirtation' is a defensive posture which preserves the distance between self and other, whereas 'fucking' is the act of embracing the other and being embraced by it, submerging and erasing the self. In Isherwood's novel, George scolds the young Kenneth because he is consciously throwing away the chance of a more profound relationship:

This may never happen again. I mean that literally! And the time is *desperately* short [...] Instead of trying to know, you commit the inexcusable triviality of [...] turning this [...] into a *flirtation*! You don't

like the word, do you? But it's the word. It's the enormous tragedy of everything nowadays. Flirtation. Flirtation instead of fucking, if you'll pardon my coarseness. All any of you ever do is flirt [...] and miss the one thing that might really [...] *transform your entire life*.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst Thomas seems to be ready to accept the consequences of his involvement, Leo is still uncertain between letting himself go and restraining himself from any deeper participation: this indecision is the source of all his anxiety. On this anguished note, the narration goes back to Leo's solitary journey which increasingly resembles an escape from 'l'orrore della perdita di Thomas'.

On a ship crossing the North Sea he suddenly sees—in a scene reminiscent of the appearance of the 'Rex' in Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973)—a Russian ferry coming out of the fog. This sort of spectre seems to have on him a positive influence: the sound of the siren reminds him of a horn that incites the soldiers to fight, he is excited 'come avesse appena avvistato Moby Dick' (I, 969) and the desire to reach London becomes stronger and even acquires the features of a possible chance of salvation:

Sta finalmente lasciando il continente e con esso il corpo martoriato di Thomas. Si lascia alle spalle la guerra, i cadaveri, il dolore, i campi di sterminio, le città distrutte e rase al suolo. L'Inghilterra gli appare come un paese separato e distante in cui non conosce nessuno e nessuno lo conosce, in cui può stare solo senza soffrire la solitudine [...] Dietro si lascia un continente in via di distruzione. Thomas era la Storia; il suo paese e la sua lingua gli scenari della guerra. (I, 970).

The parallel between his partner and the concept of History is a central feature of this movement and gives way to another portion of memory connected to another journey made with Thomas through Germany. Once in Dresden, Leo recalls an

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<sup>28</sup> Isherwood, pp. 149-50.

episode of his childhood: the desperation he felt after watching a documentary on the Holocaust. Persecution and death are the main thematic constants of this movement. The pain connected to Thomas' death is absorbed into that linked to the destruction caused by the Nazis and associated with the need for a peaceful space, safe from the horrors of history. This space is that of love and when the two of them finally reach West Berlin, with all its guilty Western pleasures, Leo feels tired, but nonetheless happy: 'Sentiva che fra gli orrori della Storia esisteva per lui un punto di riferimento e che avrebbe potuto fidarsi di quello' (I, 976). According to Enrico Minardi:

Questa associazione sembra ispirata da quella categoria di 'letteratura interiore', di cui Tondelli aveva parlato in un articolo dedicato alla Bachmann, laddove 'i campi di battaglia, le morti quotidiane, la sopraffazione dell'altro avvengono in forma di *delitti sublimi* negli strati profondi della personalità e del comportamento. Non c'è, all'esterno, spargimento di sangue, eppure i cadaveri sono fra di noi'.<sup>29</sup>

Tondelli's emotional literature acquires in this way a new layer of depth, another evidence of the maturity reached by the author in this novel.

At his arrival in Folkestone, Leo has the impression of being a refugee thrown in the midst of thousands of other expatriates who are lost in a land that will never be their own. Even the description of the wharf resembles the scenes seen many times in pictures and documentaries on the Holocaust and other similar tragedies:

Passano container stipati [...] di bagagli. Un enorme trasferimento di oggetti intimi, di vestiti, calze, pettini, saponette, dentifrici, mutande. Un

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<sup>29</sup> Minardi, p. 92. Tondelli's article on Bachmann is 'Fenomenologia dell'abbandono', II, pp. 805-6.

gruppo di donne [...] sta guardando in alto, verso una gru che sta trasferendo i loro bagagli. Hanno costruito in terra come un piccolo muro, mettendo valigia su valigia, un mattone sopra l'altro. Si sono barricate dietro ai loro oggetti, nel tentativo di costruirsi un riparo in quella terra straniera che non sarà mai la loro patria. E ora aspettano, mute, immobili, che dal cielo arrivino gli ultimi mattoni. (I, 976-977).

In *Camere separate*, London, one of the most significant places in Tondelli's personal mythology, is unwelcoming and characterized by the glowering impression of a world which is going adrift and is utterly incapable of sustaining the needs and demands of the weakest part of its population. In his search for a flat, Leo comes to terms with the harsh reality of immigrant labour and encounters only an interminable series of damp and small rat-holes, inhabited by young Pakistanis and Africans. His is a descent into hell, into the hell of the urban metropolis, but also into his personal abyss where he is accompanied by 'il corpo sofferente e incancrenito di Thomas incollato al suo, proprio attaccato alla sua pelle, inchiodato' (I, 980). This constant and obsessive presence is with him throughout his pilgrimage in a city where he is unable to do anything except scrutinize his struggle to survive in silence. Like so many wide open eyes, buildings come after buildings, clubs after clubs and Leo replies to their stare from an isolated and evasive position. This roaming around the city triggers a sort of internal short-circuit which gives Leo a new excruciating, but also enlightening, awareness. One night at the Heaven club he finally realizes that:

Dovrebbe digiunare e flagellarsi con un cilicio. E invece è lì che vaga da un pub all'altro, da una discoteca all'altra. Capisce per la prima volta che non sta affatto morendo, come pensava. Sta continuando a vivere [...] senza Thomas. Leo senza Thomas. È inconcepibile. Significa una sola cosa: che anche Leo è morto. E non nell'altro, che invece è arrivato fedele

alla fine della sua esistenza. Ma proprio nel suo ideale. Perché lui è destinato a continuare e in questo modo a uccidere, giorno dopo giorno, quell'unità armonica che si chiamava Leo-e-Thomas e che ora non c'è più e non potrà più esserci [...] Ha intravisto un percorso di cambiamento e lo vuole compiere interamente. (I, 989).

George, in *A Single Man*, seems to have these same feelings. He is painfully aware of his survival and of the fact that Jim is by this time part of the past and no longer of use to him, but still:

George remembers him so faithfully. George makes himself remember. He is afraid of forgetting. Jim is my life, he says. But he will have to forget, if he wants to go on living. Jim is Death [...] *Then why will George stay here?* This is where he found Jim. He believes he will find another Jim here. He doesn't know it, but he has started looking already [...] George clings only to Now. It is Now that he must find another Jim. Now that he must love. Now that he must live.<sup>30</sup>

In both cases failing to remember and going on with life are perceived as the ultimate betrayal. Leo and George desperately try to cling to their deceased lovers even when it is obvious that time for mourning must come to an end. This awareness prompts Leo to come back home where he will finally have the chance to start loving himself again.

The second part of the chapter is completely devoted to the accounts of Leo's solitary life, at first in Milan, and then back in his birthplace. In his Milan flat, Leo is surrounded by all the objects bought with the earnings of his work as a writer. The power of words, possibly redeeming, as we have seen in the first movement of the book, is transformed here into something oppressive and

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<sup>30</sup> Isherwood, pp. 154-5.

suffocating. Words are reified into possessions and Leo finds himself a prisoner of his own words:

Quando era poco più che un ragazzo aveva iniziato a scrivere [...] lo aveva fatto perché gli era sembrato il modo più naturale di esprimere questa sua diversità. Ma ora [...] anche scrivere è diventato per lui una professione, un mestiere [...] In questi momenti vede tutto come una prigione costituita di parole mercificate [...] Parole, parole. Vive di parole nel senso più letterale del termine [...] Lui che aveva affidato alle parole, non ancora alla letteratura, non ancora ai libri, ma proprio alle lettere e ai racconti tutta l'ansia e il desiderio di un cambiamento della sua vita, si trova ora annullato dalla mancanza di desiderio per le parole. E, conseguentemente, per le cose. (I, 992-993).

Reconciliation with his self can only come through the reconciliation with words and their healing power. In order to achieve this result, Leo devotes himself to the re-reading of the Old Testament and to the re-evaluation of religion, in the form of a 'sacralità dell'umano' which consists of

Un atteggiamento di ascolto delle cose e degli uomini, un osservare e contemplare, che ha a che fare con il suo stesso modo di essere [...] Avverte la presenza del sacro come qualcosa di tangibile nella realtà, qualcosa su cui il suo sguardo si posa con devozione. (I, 995-996).

Leo is not tempted by mysticism, which implies absolute ideas and unfaltering beliefs; he is attracted rather by a 'religion without prayers', something real and tangible, that closely recalls Isherwood's remarks about Hinduism, and especially the Vedānta philosophy. In *Vedānta for Modern Man* Isherwood argues for the empirical nature of mysticism and the necessity of building up a personal form of religion, whose reward is in the effort of construction itself.<sup>31</sup> As for one's duty

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<sup>31</sup> *Vedānta for Modern Man*, ed. by Christopher Isherwood, London, Allen & Unwin, 1952.

towards society, this consists, Isherwood explains, in the endeavour of loving others, considering them *sub specie aeternitatis*, thus crediting them with the attributes of God himself, always bearing in mind that 'to recognize, within each individual, the same eternal reality [...] I must first find the eternal reality within myself. You can't recognize what you don't know'.<sup>32</sup>

This same attitude is to be found in Leo and in his quest for a deeper knowledge of himself which eventually brings him back to his birthplace and parents' house. Leo's hometown, 'un piccolo borgo della bassa padana' (I, 1003), could easily be assimilated to Tondelli's birthplace, Correggio. Here he has the chance to consider carefully his difference, which seems to be connected to a destiny of loneliness and separation from the rest of society.

This part of the second movement is characterized by a strong sense of connection both with the rest of *Camere separate* and with Tondelli's other books. When Leo comes into his room, he finds it transformed and deprived of its former identity:

La sua stanza non è più, in un certo senso, quella in cui ha abitato per vent'anni. È rimasta la solita camera [...] Ma non è più quella. Lui non c'è più fra quelle pareti. Ormai sono rimasti soltanto reperti malinconici o tracce prive di significato in cui non pulsa la vita [...] Attaccati all'uscio, sono rimasti gli adesivi pubblicitari [...] Sopra lo stereo è rimasto l'ingrandimento di una sua fotografia in bianco e nero, ma fra i suoi vecchi dischi [...] sua madre ha mischiato i suoi [...] La sua stanza è stata invasa dagli oggetti di casa. Ed è cambiata. A ogni ritorno lui ha notato un ordine diverso delle sue cose fino a vederle sparire. Sono scomparsi i grandi manifesti di film come *Cabaret* o *Cane di paglia* [...] sparite le locandine di *Mattatoio Cinque* e le fotografie delle Giornate del cinema italiano del '73 [...] La sua stanza è diventata il deposito dei detriti dell'appartamento. Anno dopo anno l'invadenza degli oggetti di uso domestico ha preso il sopravvento. (I, 1013-1014).

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<sup>32</sup> Isherwood, p. 32.



The ghost of Annacarla's room, crammed with books and records, preserved alive by virtue of the very same objects kept in it, which was the symbol in *Altri libertini* of a whole generation, appears in this passage to have been conquered by another idea of life and society, where the values are different and incompatible with Leo's. This break with the past is typified by the painful awareness of a constant drift from one's past, which is perceived in an even harsher way if the place of this consciousness has once been distinguished by a sense of security and well-being. From the moment of the first departure from home to that of the final coming back Tondelli's work is characterized, according to Marco Belpoliti, by:

*Nostalgia*, il "dolore del ritorno". È attraverso la nostalgia che i personaggi di Tondelli—e lui stesso [...] rivivono la catastrofe del distacco, il dolore dell'abbandono. Tutto l'arco delle sue narrazioni si svolge tra una partenza e un ritorno, o meglio tra due rimpianti: il rimpianto, di lontano, del luogo materno—paese, casa, appartamento, nido—e il rimpianto, al ritorno, delle avventure mancate (V. Jankélévitch) [...] Il dolore del ritorno, la *nostalgia*, che impregna le pagine di Tondelli, sia quelle picaresche, anticonformiste, trasgressive di *Altri libertini*, come quelle intime, riflessive e dolenti di *Camere separate*, si muove dentro questo cerchio definito da una partenza che è un ritorno e da un ritorno che è anche una partenza. Forse, questo spiega anche la misteriosa inquietudine che vi si percepisce [...] Ma la scrittura è [...] anche [...] il luogo della sospensione fra la partenza e il ritorno [...]—falso movimento—condizione in cui si è magicamente fermi e in "azione"; scrivere è per Tondelli il tentativo di rompere il cerchio che si richiude su di lui reiterando il dolore del ritorno.<sup>33</sup>

Belpoliti's reference to Vladimir Jankélévitch is deeply resonant with Tondelli's writings. One of the central issues in the work of the French philosopher is the idea of conscience as internal restlessness, constant contradiction within the self.

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<sup>33</sup> Marco Belpoliti, 'La nostalgia di sé', *Il Verri*, vols. 3-4 (1993), pp. 161-165 (p. 164).

Conscience is the measure of man's failure and is at work before and after each one of his actions. The self is thus caught up between its need for integration and the inadequacy of its achievements. This contradiction, this 'mauvaise conscience', produces an ambiguous relation between the ideas of departure and return which is highlighted by Jankélévitch in his *L'irréversible et la nostalgie*:

Le départ est un rebondissement du retour, parfois préformé dans ce retour, et si le retour est souvent le presage d'un nouveau départ, si le retour est en quelque sorte un départ précoce, l'inverse n'est pas moins vrai: le retour est le but secret du départ, annoncé à mots couverts par ce départ lui-même; le départ est une lointaine prophétie du retour; le départ est un retour avant la lettre, un retour anticipé, surpris dès son premier commencement.<sup>34</sup>

The theme of homecoming, with its burden of consequences and past memories, is echoed in a novel published by David Leavitt in 1986, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, reviewed by Tondelli during the same year.<sup>35</sup> As Iacoli argues in his *Atlante delle derive* it may be possible to draw a parallel between this novel and *Camere separate* both from a thematic point of view—they both deal with homosexual love and dialogue among generations—and from their use of similar episodes.<sup>36</sup> An example of this parallelism is the visit to the birthplace and especially to the room where the protagonists have lived their childhood and youth. In both cases, this visit is the chance to get in touch with their own past and

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<sup>34</sup>Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L'irréversible et la nostalgie*, Paris, Flammarion, 1974, pp. 364-5.

'Departure is a development of return, sometimes it is even preformed in the return itself, and, if a return is somehow an early departure, the contrary is nonetheless true: returning is the secret aim of leaving, mysteriously announced by that same departure; leaving is a remote prophecy of homecoming, it is an early return, an anticipated coming back, surprised by its very beginning'.

<sup>35</sup> II, pp. 537-540.

<sup>36</sup> Iacoli, p. 133.

reconsider, through a perspective which is situated between their maturity and younger selves, their present situation. In Leavitt's book we read:

Then he went into his room. They had not done much with it since he'd left. The walls were still filled with the books of his childhood, like all the books in the apartment, haphazardly crammed on top of one another. Off the shelf he pulled an old gray and pink book with a slightly torn dust jacket [...] Like a child, Philip sat cross-legged on the floor. On the jacket cover [...] three of Derek Moulthrop's famous fat-cheeked emerald-eyed children [...] stood in a room full of toy robots [...] It thrilled him to think that he had once read this book merely for the pleasure of it, merely because he had enjoyed Moulthrop's other books, and had not realized that someday he would fall in love with a man who had been raised in the benevolent atmosphere of the same mind, the same imagination that had generated these words, these pictures. And yet his nine-year-old self had sat here, lost in *The Wish Portal*, and had not known he was being offered a prophecy of his own life it would take him years to recognize. Eliot had always been there, in those books, on those shelves.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst, in Leavitt's novel, childhood books seem to carry with them a pleasant prophecy of Philip's future, the prophecy of love and being loved, in Tondelli's case they appear to be the carriers of far gloomier predictions:

In questa stanza [...] lui ha scritto le sue prime pagine [...] Da quel balcone [...] fissava le luci della città [...] Là si svolgeva la vita e lui, nella miseria della sua giovinezza qui, all'ottavo piano, non poteva fare altro che sognarla e descriverla [...] Sul tavolino [...] sono rimasti i libri [...] che riesce a leggere solo qui, nella sua stanza. Alcuni volumi di Antonio Delfini e di Silvio d'Arzo. Dal balcone della sua stanza lui può vedere i luoghi in cui sono nati [...] Solo in loro lui trova quei particolari aspetti di follia, noia, malinconia che solitamente non si attribuiscono al carattere della gente della sua terra. Ma lui è stanco di descrizioni di un popolo esuberante, aperto [...] A lui ora interessa la parte nascosta di questo carattere, quella che causa i suicidi, che crea gli alienati [...] Solo in questi due scrittori [...] lui trova descritta quella certa impenetrabilità del carattere emiliano, quella certa scostanza, quella bizzarria o lunaticità malinconica e assorta che ha conosciuto in suo padre e ora conosce in se stesso. (I, 1014-1015).

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<sup>37</sup> David Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, London, Penguin, 1986, pp. 110-1.

The books of Leo's youth, and consequently his development as an adult, seem therefore to be characterized by that dark, paranoid side of the Emilian temperament already underlined by Tondelli in *Altri libertini* and *Rimini*.

Iacoli also underlines another point of contiguity between *Camere separate* and Leavitt's work, namely with the book *Equal Affections*.<sup>38</sup> Specifically, it has to do with the writers' adoption of a child's perspective capable of shedding some light on the future of their characters. This is for Leo the chance for another meeting with his own self, as through a mirror:

Per la prima volta nella vita il suo sguardo è catturato esclusivamente dai bambini [...] Li immagina adulti, vede in ognuno di loro i tratti espressivi che avranno da ragazzi e da vecchi. Ricorda altri bambini, altre scolaresche, la sua. E si vede in tutta l'enormità della propria sofferenza di fanciullo. È un sentimento struggente che lo stordisce perché non è più in grado di avvicinarsi a quel bambino grassottello, senza denti, e consolarlo; appoggiargli una mano sulla piccola spalla e sorridergli dicendogli che non deve avere paura. (I, 985).

In the case of Leavitt it is more a fantasy, a projection of Danny's desires:

DANNY'S FANTASY: He's twelve years old [...] A sunny Saturday afternoon [...] He is locking his bicycle to a lamppost [...] when he feels the proximity of another body, feels warm breath against his hair. He turns around [...] and a man is standing over him [...] a man who is at once a stranger and oddly, intimately familiar to him—but where from? [...] 'Excuse me', the man says, 'I'm sorry to bother you, I?' He puts his hands in his pockets, looks away. 'Danny', he says. 'Danny'. Danny's eyes suddenly fill with tears. His cheeks flush. He looks at the ground. 'I'm you,' the stranger says. 'I'm who you're going to become. And I've come to tell you—you're going to be fine, just fine [...] All the things you're worried about [...] all the things that make you suffer—they're nothing [...] I know. And I've come so you'll know [...] And you'll have love,

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<sup>38</sup> Iacoli, p. 134-5.

Danny. I know you can't believe it now, I know everything you feel. You don't imagine anyone will ever love you, you can't conceive how anyone could love you. But someone will. You'll see.' The hand on his shoulder—larger, thickly veined [...] is his own hand.<sup>39</sup>

What in Leo's case cannot be realized—when he reassures his younger self that everything will eventually be alright—seems instead to be accomplished in Danny's fantasy. The grown-up hand on the child's shoulder, with all its supportive charge,

simboleggia, in Tondelli più che in Leavitt, la necessità, nel ritorno ai luoghi dell'infanzia, di un riparo, la proiezione di una difesa sul sé inerme, resa possibile dall'oscillazione di piani (esterno/interno, io/sé, e le opposizioni tra le varie età di Leo) in una storia ricorsiva, nei termini di quell' "epos [...] interiore", nelle parole dell'autore, che attraversa i tempi del protagonista come una "asimmetria esistenziale" consistente in una "difficile accettazione del proprio cammino e del proprio destino".<sup>40</sup>

The last part of this second movement is marked by the dramatic encounter between Leo, who is flying back from New York, and an old father who is bringing his dead son back to Italy. The parallel between this man shattered by the pain of his loss and Leo's personal bereavement is the key to understanding the true nature of Leo's suffering which could be condensed in the figures of the 'padre orfano' and of the 'amante vedovo'. The strength of Leo's pain is mainly caused by its unjustness: in his perception, his survival, and also the father who outlives his son, are appalling acts of cruelty which cannot be defended under any circumstances:

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<sup>39</sup> David Leavitt, *Equal Affections*, London, Penguin, 1989, pp. 14-5.

<sup>40</sup> Iacoli, p. 135.

Era arrabbiato. L'uomo [...] si era mantenuto integro per seppellire il proprio figlio. L'atto contro natura non era tanto la morte dell'uomo più giovane, quanto la sopravvivenza forzata del più vecchio. E allora pensò che anche lui aveva sepolto, in un certo senso, Thomas. E che sia lui sia il vecchio, erano degli assassini che in un modo o in un altro avevano controllato fino alla fine la vita della persona che più amavano. Fino a deporre nella fossa il corpo che avevano creato [...] lui è un torturatore e la vittima designata di quell'aguzzino che porta il suo stesso nome [...] La sua esigenza di felicità e di amore ha ucciso gli altri [...] Con Thomas non è morto solo l'amore, ma anche la sua, personale, strategia dell'amore. (I, 1058).

Behind this terrible awareness, Leo recognizes a tendency towards sadomasochism that he is not able to avoid. This inclination is sustained by an episode of the book. In a s/m nightclub in Washington, Leo grasps a distressing image of himself with one of the young men there in one of the huge mirrors placed on the ceiling. This view, which works as a sort of amplifier of the opening image of the novel (Leo's reflection in the plane's window) gives him the awareness of his true self. This consciousness, along with the genesis of the idea of love as 'separate rooms', will be central in the development of the third and final movement of the book.

### *The Third Movement: 'Camere separate'*

The movement is opened by a long reflection upon the genesis of the idea of love as 'camere separate'. After a disastrous experience of life in common, Leo starts developing his new love strategy:

Non avrebbe mai potuto vivere con Thomas nella stessa casa [...] il fatto di vivere distanti, era stato uno stimolo a continuare [...] Giorno dopo giorno [...] il loro rapporto si assestava e, paradossalmente, stava approdando a un equilibrio nuovo. La piccola frase [...] che però apparì a Leo distesa e sufficiente come un concetto ben elaborato [...] fu "camere

separate”. E spiegò a Thomas che avrebbe voluto, con lui, un rapporto di contiguità, di appartenenza ma non di possesso. (I, 1067-1071).

This project suggests a non-egalitarian relationship, totally based on Leo's desire to be with Thomas only when and where he wants to. They become connected in a way similar to that of a victim and his executioner: again, the sadomasochistic tendencies of Leo seem to lie in the background of the whole scheme. Thomas needs to defend himself from Leo's arbitrariness and his way of doing this is to move in with a young woman, Susann, with whom he will be finally able to live a proper relationship. The character of Susann is never presented directly to the reader—we never see her and we only know about her existence through Thomas' words. She is a shadow, a ghost behind Thomas. Nevertheless, Leo accepts her being there, and seems to consider the woman as a mere tool—a necessity for Thomas, and a facilitation for him—to keep his project in balance. He does not consider Susann as a possible menace to his love. The presence of a third female party in a male relationship is also in Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man*, but here the character of Doris is more complex. She is dying and George goes to visit her at the hospital. Whilst Susann is never threatening to Leo, Doris has at one point been a concrete and real peril. She is 'Woman the Enemy' to George who at some point even had to watch Jim running away with her. From a certain perspective, Doris is to George what Thomas's father is to Leo. They are both the embodiment of a natural law. She is

a big arrogant animal [...] demanding that George shall step aside, bow down and yield to the female prerogative, hide his unnatural head in shame. I am Doris. I am Woman. I am Bitch-Mother Nature. The Church

and the Law and the State exist to support me. I claim my biological rights. I demand Jim.<sup>41</sup>

Though the circumstances are different, their role is the same: they underline the marginality of homosexual relations that are required silently to step aside once 'natural' and socially accepted conditions arise. Alienation and isolation appear thus to be the principal elements in a non-heterosexual liaison. Even if 'Woman the Enemy' is defeated, as happens in the cases of Jim and Thomas who eventually come back to their lovers, alienation and isolation will ultimately be triumphant through their deaths. This situation implies a deep impasse for the homosexual who is constantly compelled to resolve the tension between generativity, which is the first consequence of 'natural' love, and stagnation, the typical condition of homosexual love, which may be represented as a form of denied procreativity. Both Leo and Jim experience the feeling of emptiness connected to the impossibility of procreating, of leaving a trace of themselves in the world. This impasse is resolved in their case through the option of creativity: their intellectual work, the books, the conversations, the lectures, will be their legacy to the world. In Leo's case, this choice will become clear towards the end of the book.

After three years of self-imposed solitude, Leo starts realizing that this situation is killing him, that his seclusion is turning him into a 'grumo irrisolto di rancore e di odio' (I, 1083), and the same happens to George. Once alone, he lets himself slip into anger and misanthropy. He has become:

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<sup>41</sup> Isherwood, p. 80.



a mean old story-book monster. This is the role George has found himself playing, with increasing violence, since he started to live alone. It releases a part of his nature which he hated to let Jim see. What would Jim say if he could see George waving his arms and roaring like a madman from the window?<sup>42</sup>

The awareness of his becoming barren and dry compels Leo to change, and this is represented by the introduction of a new character, Eugenio. This boy, who shows an instinctive fondness for him, will not be his new lover, for Leo is no longer able to love in the way he once loved Thomas, but will rather be the key to a newly developed life project. With Eugenio, and with his other friends, Leo plans to form a new kind of family:

Ora sa che lui non è fatto per amare una persona [...] Lui si sente in pace solo nella sua solitudine, accudito dagli amici più cari. Quello che sta facendo è il tentativo di formarsi una famiglia, una strana famiglia senza donne né figli, ma i cui vincoli fra i componenti siano altrettanto forti e consapevoli. (I, 1092).

His role towards Eugenio is similar to that of a ‘padre confessore’ (I, 1095); once again Leo’s urge towards procreativity is expressed in a vicarious form: he nourishes Eugenio’s dreams, he urges him to study, to read and to love, but taking care to keep the distance between them, for he knows how painful and destructive his love can be. This new consciousness accompanies Leo towards the end of the book, which is characterized by the recovery of his lost connection with words and by the re-evaluation of his role as a writer. This double reconciliation marks the final transformation of Leo’s denied procreativity into creativity. In Québec, during a conference on Jack Kerouac

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<sup>42</sup> Isherwood, p. 15.

Leo riflette [...] sul fatto che la sua vita è ormai troppo indistricabilmente legata allo scrivere; e che questa sola cosa gli importa e è questa, non lui, a dirigere gli spostamenti interiori della sua vita [...] se nel profondo è inquieto e non troverà mai pace, è perché lui è diverso e si deve costruire una scala di valori partendo proprio da questa sua diversità [...] quello che lo distingue dagli amici del paese in cui è nato, non è tanto il fatto di non avere un lavoro, né una casa, né un compagno, né figli, ma proprio il suo scrivere, il dire continuamente in termini di scrittura quello che gli altri sono ben contenti di tacere [...] Allora, forse, tutta la sua vita, il suo essere separato, non è altro [...] che una elaborata messa in scena della propria, inestinguibile, volontà di svenimento; la spettacolarizzazione pubblica di un complesso di colpa, di un'angoscia che lui ha sentito forse fin dal primo giorno in cui ha aperto gli occhi al mondo, e cioè che non sarebbe mai stato felice. E questo senso di colpa [...] si è dislocato in un mondo separato, quello della letteratura, permettendogli di sopravvivere, anche di gioire, ma sempre con la consapevolezza che mai la pienezza della vita, come comunemente la intendono gli altri, sarebbe stata sua. (I, 1101-1103).

The conquest of this new consciousness vaguely resembles happiness:

Segue le parole della canzone di Morrissey: "Oh, I'm so glad to grow older, to move away from those younger years, now I'm in love for the first time". In un qualche modo è felice. (I, 1105).

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have sought to demonstrate not only the strong and persistent presence of intertextual relations within Tondelli's literary work, and their relations with postmodern ideas of space, but also the different forms these relations assumed at different stages in his career. In his first two books, *Altri libertini* (1980) and *Pao Pao* (1982), elements of American and British culture are exposed to the reader through frequent overt quotations and references. This uninterrupted display of knowledge has two main functions. On the one hand, it enables Tondelli to mark out his distance from an Italian literary tradition that he regarded as provincial and withdrawn. The connection with other cultures is used, therefore, not only as a source of literary inspiration, but also as a means to express a deep restlessness. The lack of Italian books and writers able to give voice to the needs of the younger generation lies behind this attention towards cultural products of a different origin. The desecration of canonical high culture is made visible on a micro-textual level by various means such as direct quotations, use and distortion of proper names and creolization of lexis. On the other hand, these references (to North American culture in particular) allow Tondelli's first two books to appeal directly to his own generation. Indeed, the repertoire of readings and interests displayed here is not exclusive to Tondelli; it is well-rooted in all his contemporaries. The continuous reminder of a common milieu is used as a key to access a wider generational perspective.

The publication of *Rimini* (1985) constituted a turning point in Tondelli's career and also introduced new kinds of intertextuality. Whereas in his first two

books Tondelli's literary models were mainly those of the Beat Generation, in *Rimini* it is the noir novel, and especially the work of Raymond Chandler, that constitutes the main literary genre and 'voice' with which the text enters into dialogue. At the same time, the novel is characterized by a polyphonic structure influenced by the theories of Bakhtin and Kristeva and involves a pastiche of different styles and registers, each one corresponding to a different narrative strand. Among these, the stylistic register of American hardboiled crime fiction stands out in particular. The choice of an Americanized writing style—along with the use of generic aspects of 'Americanism' and American place names—testifies to Tondelli's constant relations with American culture, either real or imagined. Furthermore the presence of specific characters and episodes that are clearly modelled on books such as *The Big Sleep* (1939) and *The Long Goodbye* (1953) is evidence of the strong intertextual connection between *Rimini* and Chandler's novels.

In Tondelli's last novel, *Camere separate* (1989), the forms of intertextuality are much more interiorized. The importance attributed to Austrian writers such as Peter Handke and Ingeborg Bachmann—both characterized by the same intimist attitude—testifies to a change in Tondelli's literary tastes and also in his intertextual practice. A general shift towards a more personal and pensive stance can be observed in this novel, and this also affects his preferences in terms of English-speaking authors. The centrality attributed to Christopher Isherwood's works and especially to his 1964 novel *A Single Man* is an example of this shift. The intertextual relation between *Camere separate* and *A Single Man*—or David Leavitt's novels such as *The Lost Language of Cranes* and *Equal Affections*—can

be seen on the macro-level of the text through the re-elaboration of themes such as the difficulty of coping with loss, the unfamiliarity of one's own face, the intrusion of a female third party and the experience of homecoming.

The author's private journey towards maturity and awareness influences in various degrees the books' modes of intertextuality. Tondelli's literary understanding is also uninterruptedly nourished by his activity as critic. The articles and essays collected in *Un weekend postmoderno* (1990) can be read as a subtext that subtends his fictional works and testifies to a constant evolution in his taste and consciousness. Furthermore, the generational element which was so central at the beginning of his career progressively ceases to affect Tondelli's literary choices. The author, free from his generation's cultural background, starts to follow a personal poetic which, nonetheless, remains suspended between the two opposite magnets of the 'Via Emilia' (the rural origins, Correggio, the province) and 'il West' (a place not necessarily located geographically, but to be considered in the widest and most metaphorical sense). These spatial coordinates, therefore, despite the marked evolution in Tondelli's writings, remain in this respect constant throughout his career.

Pier Vittorio Tondelli died in 1991. Although it is difficult to contextualize and historicize his works such a relatively short time after his death I believe it is possible to read his books afresh, free from earlier types of critical bias and established clichés. Over the last decade and a half cultural borders have become more fluid and the speed of information exchanges has greatly increased, and these changes have affected the production of fiction and made national literatures more open to permeation by other cultures. Questions of intertextuality have, as a

result, become more visible and their study has come to appear especially interesting and productive. Inevitably, the emphasis that I have placed on these aspects of Tondelli's work in the thesis has meant that other aspects, also deserving of study, have been left out. One of these, which seems to me particularly interesting, is his activity as talent scout and editor of young writers. I believe that a thorough investigation of the editorial work behind the three anthologies published at the end of the 1980s—*Giovani Blues* (1986), *Belli & perversi* (1987) and *Papergang* (1990)—could be revealing of the writer's approach to literature and at the same time give another layer of depth to that emotional approach already investigated by Roberto Carnero and Antonio Spadaro.

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